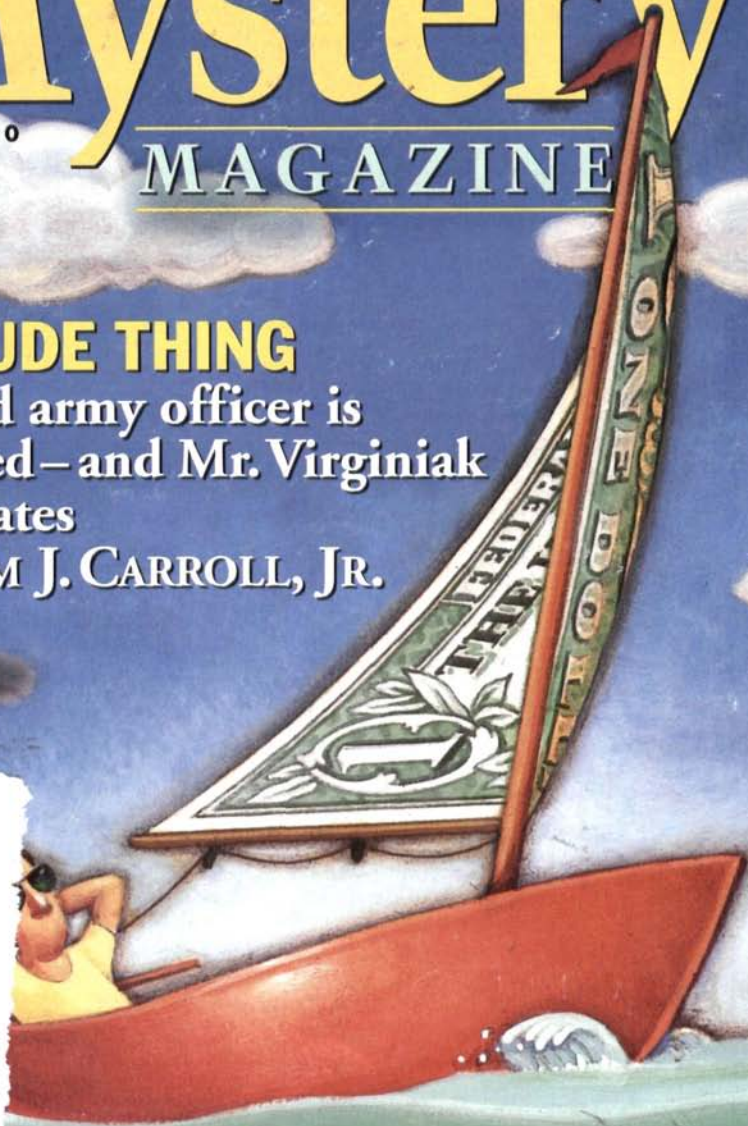


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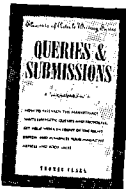
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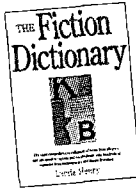
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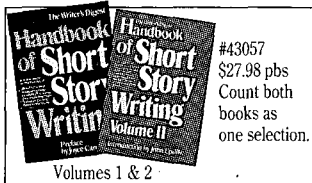
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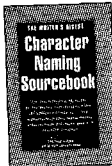


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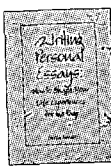
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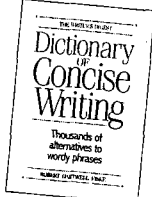
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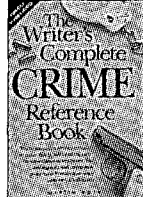
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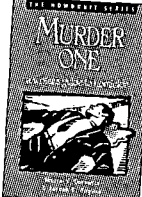
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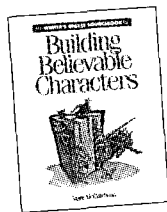
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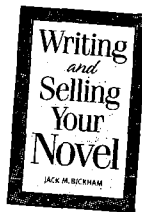
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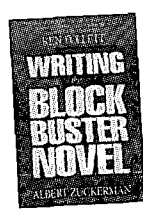
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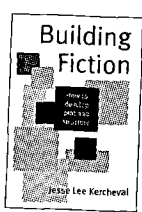
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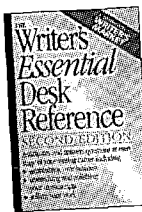
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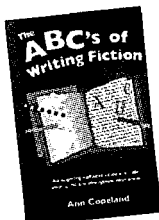
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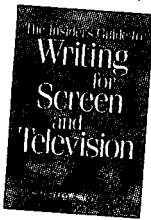


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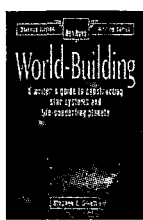
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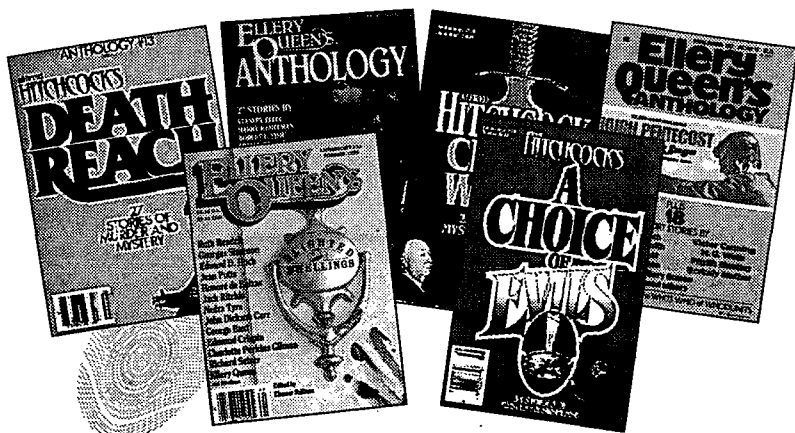
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EDITOR'S NOTES

Cathleen Jordan

Steve Hockensmith, author of "Erie's Last Day," brings us his first published mystery. He's written five science fiction and fantasy tales for small presses and *Analog* and writes features for the Chicago *Tribune* and other publications. He is the editor of *Cinescape* magazine as well as senior editor of *The X-Files Official Magazine*.

Alex Irvine, author of "Green River Chantey" (also a first mystery), "got the idea over the course of several camping trips in the Mammoth Cave area—it's one of my favorite places." He too has a science fiction past, with stories and poetry in *Asimov's*, *F&SF*, and some small presses. He first took up writing because he "had a crush on a girl who liked poetry," is now finishing his Ph.D. in English at Denver University, where he is a graduate instructor.

Molly MacRae, author of "Missing Something," had two stories here in the early '90's, but we didn't introduce her because, once, this column was filled with our Christmas card and, the second time, we had a guest editorial. Ms. MacRae was then "director of the history museum in Jonesborough, Tennessee—Tennessee's oldest town. . . . Until this past April I managed the last independent bookstore in our region. We finally had to close the store due to superstore competition. . . . Other jobs: research assistant working on a Sumerian dictionary; taught emotionally disturbed teenagers how to use hand tools; line worker in a towel factory; short order cook; university cook (for two thousand); research assistant for architectural historian."

Her bookstore was mentioned twice in Sharyn McCrumb's *The Ballad of Frankie Silver*.

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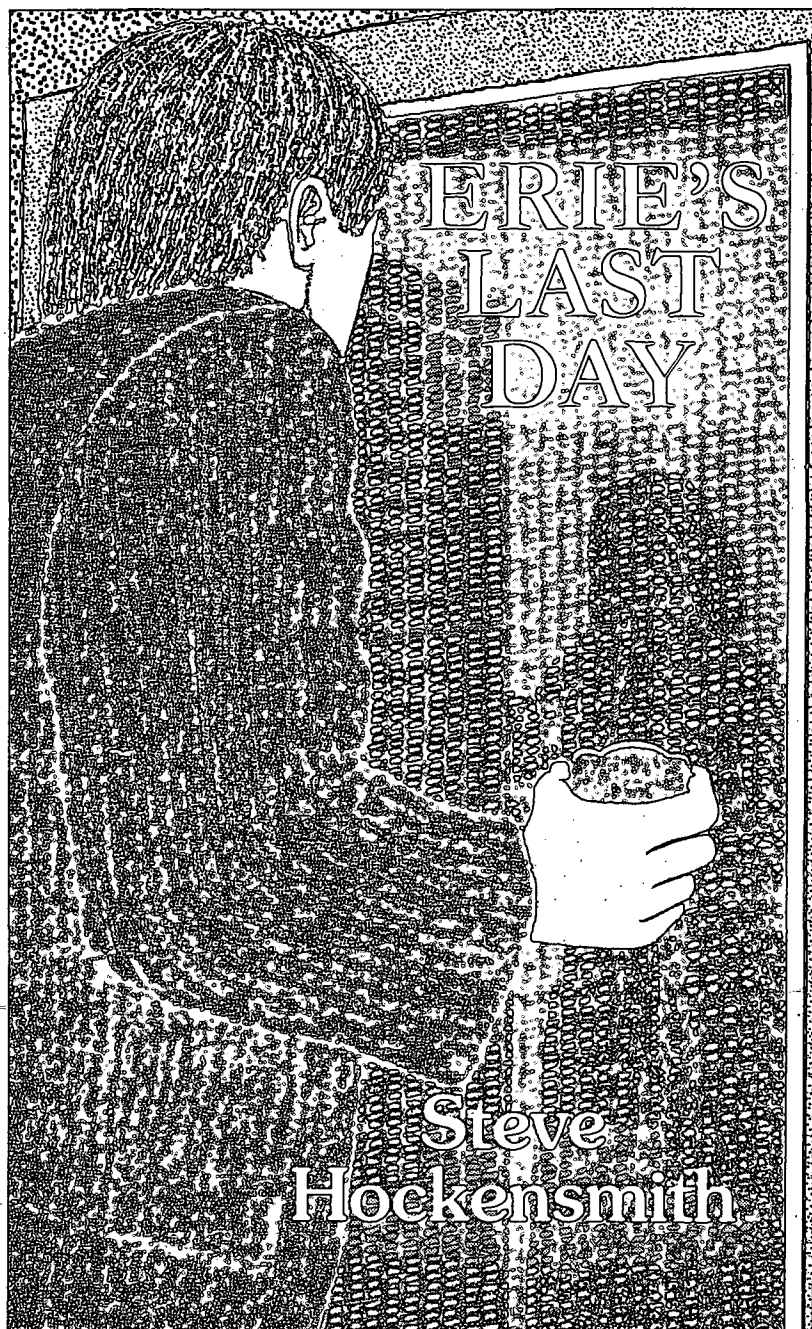


Illustration by David Fielding

Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine 5/00

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7:00 A.M.:

The radio alarm by Larry Erie's queen-sized bed turned itself on. A deep-voiced announcer began telling Erie about the morning's top stories. Erie didn't really care what the morning's top stories might be, but he lay there for a while and let the announcer ramble.

There was nobody there to give him a playful kick and tell him to shut that noise off. There was nobody there to make breakfast for. There was nobody there to fetch pills for. It was just him and the announcer.

7:19 A.M.:

Erie finally pulled himself out of bed and went out to the porch in his pajamas and robe to pick up the morning paper. It was cool outside, just like the cheerful people on the radio said it would be. A storm passing through in the night had left puddles on the pavement.

He scanned the yard for the little black shape that sometimes came bounding up to him from behind shrubs or garbage cans, meowing greetings at him as if he were a long-lost relative. But the cat wasn't there. Erie went back inside.

He ate breakfast sitting on the edge of the bed. It was a habit he couldn't drop even though there was no longer anyone there to keep company.

7:42 A.M.:

Erie showered, shaved, flossed, brushed, gargled, rinsed, and repeated. Then he carefully picked out his clothes. He pulled on his best white shirt, his best suit, his favor-

ite tie. He shined his shoes before putting them on. He looked at himself in the mirror, straightened his tie, smoothed a few errant hairs into place. Then he pulled his gun off the bureau and clipped it onto his belt.

Some cops started to get a little sloppy years before they retired. Others waited till just a few months or weeks before their last day to start letting themselves go. Erie remembered one cop, a fellow detective, who came in for his last day in a Hawaiian shirt and bermuda shorts. It gave everybody a good laugh.

But that wasn't Erie's way. He was determined to make every day of his time on the force count. Even his last.

8:07 A.M.:

Erie was reaching out to open his car door when he heard the cat. She was hurrying up the driveway toward him, meowing loudly. He knelt and stretched out his right arm. As always, the cat rubbed her face on his hand several times before flopping over on her back and stretching out her legs. He rubbed her stomach. Her fur was long and matted.

"How do you like that, buddy? How do you like that?" Erie asked the cat.

The cat purred.

Erie had never owned a cat, never really known a cat, never been interested in them. He had no idea how old the little black cat was. She'd been hanging around the neighborhood about a month. She had grown noticeably bigger since

he'd first seen her. She had also become friendlier. She wore no collar or tags.

Occasionally Erie had found himself worrying about the cat. Where was she sleeping? What was she eating? He'd seen her once over by Green River Road, and the thought of her trying to cross busy streets had haunted him for hours.

But Erie always reminded himself that he wasn't a cat person. And he had bigger things to worry about than dumb animals.

"That's enough for today," he told the cat as he stood up. She rolled over on her stomach and looked up at him expectantly. "Nope. No more. So long."

He climbed into his car and started the engine. He backed out of the driveway slowly, keeping an eye on the cat lest she jump up and dart under the tires. But she stayed where she was, watching him, seemingly puzzled by his desire to leave this perfectly wonderful driveway and this perfectly wonderful cat.

8:33 A.M.:

On his way into police headquarters from the parking lot, Erie was stopped by three cops. They were all men he hadn't seen or spoken to in the last week. Each one stopped him separately and said the same thing.

"I'm sorry about your wife."

Erie said the only thing he could: "Thanks."

On his way past the Human Resources office a female co-worker called out, "Look who's early! Hey, Larry, don't you know you're not

supposed to come in before noon on your last day!"

"The early bird catches the worm," Erie said.

A uniformed officer stopped as she passed. "You don't have to worry about catching worms any more, Detective Erie. You just head down to Arizona and catch some sun. Leave the worms to us."

8:45 A.M.:

Erie had already cleaned out his office, for the most part. The walls were bare, his desktop was free of clutter, the drawers were practically empty aside from a few stray pens and paper clips and leftover forms. So it was impossible to miss the yellow Post-it note stuck to the exact center of his desktop. It was from Hal Allen, director of Detective Services/Homicide—his boss. The note read, "See me in my office ASAP." Erie hoped it was a special assignment, a favor he could do for Allen or the department, something that would draw on his decades of experience, something that would make his last eight hours as a police officer count.

8:48 A.M.:

Erie knew he was in trouble the second he stepped into the office of May Davis, Allen's administrative assistant and official gatekeeper. He'd walked into a trap, and there was no way out.

Twenty people were crammed behind Davis's desk. Behind them was a banner reading WE'LL MISS YOU, BIG GUY! On it were dozens of signatures surrounded by drawings of handcuffs and police badges

and men in striped prison uniforms. The people waiting for him, the entire Homicide Division reinforced by a couple of evidence technicians and some of his old buddies from other departments, began singing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow."

Erie stood there, smiling dutifully, and took it like a man.

9:09 A.M.:

Erie endured the song and the hugs and the slaps on the back and the vanilla cake with the outline of Arizona in orange frosting. He endured Allen's speech about thirty-three years of service and one hundred twelve murderers behind bars. He endured it all without ever saying, "What about those twenty-nine *unsolved* murders?" or "Why would I move to Arizona without Nancy?"

And after the ordeal was over and the revelers had all drifted away, it became clear that he was supposed to drift away, too. There were forms to fill out and drawers to empty, right? Instead, he asked Hal Allen if they could step into his office.

"What's on your mind, Larry?"

Allen was a different breed of cop. He was younger than Erie. He worked out every day. His walls weren't covered with pictures of his kids or newspaper articles about his big busts. He had his degrees—a B.A. in criminal justice, a Master's in psychology—and inspirational posters about Leadership and Goals. For him, being a cop wasn't a calling, it was a career choice. But Erie liked him and hoped he would understand.

"I was wondering if I could take back one of my cases."

"Come on, Larry," Allen said. "You're going to have to let go."

"Just for today, Hal. I just want to make some inquiries, see if I can get the ball rolling again. At the end of the day I'll turn it back over to Dave Rogers with a full briefing."

Allen shook his head, grinning. "I've heard of this condition. It's called dedication to duty. We're going to have to cure you of it. I prescribe a day playing computer solitaire followed by a much-deserved early retirement in beautiful, sunny Arizona."

"Nancy liked Arizona, Hal. We were moving there for her."

"Oh." The smile melted off Allen's face. "So you're not—"

"I don't know. We hadn't signed anything yet when Nancy took that last turn for the worse. I'm not sure I want to leave Indiana. I've lived here all my life." Erie shifted nervously in his seat. "But that's neither here nor there. I'm just asking for one more day to protect and serve."

Allen leaned forward in his swivel chair and gave Erie a long, thoughtful look as if really seeing him for the first time. "You're not going to solve your one hundred thirteenth homicide today, Larry. You're just going to end up chasing around stone-cold leads and getting nowhere."

"I love days like that."

Allen nodded. "Okay. Do what you have to do. But drop by my office before you go home tonight. I want to talk to you again."

Erie practically jumped up from his chair. For the first time that day he actually felt awake.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Anything you say."

9:31 A.M.:

Detective David Rogers was on the phone when Erie appeared in the doorway to his office. Rogers waved him in, said "No problem," and hung up. "The boss says you want to catch a bad guy today," he said.

"I just want to borrow back one of my cases. Is that okay with you?"

Rogers smiled and pointed at a stack of bound folders on one corner of his desk. "Pick your poison," he said. "If you insist on working your last day, I'm not going to stop you."

Erie shuffled through the case files. Did he want the fifteen-year-old crack dealer, four months dead? The unidentified, twentysomething woman found in the woods of Lloyd Park, six months dead? Or the middle-aged insurance salesman, ten months dead?

Lifeless eyes stared up at him from Polaroids paper-clipped to Xeroxed autopsy reports. They looked inside him, told him, "Do something. Avenge me. Avenge *me*."

But justice isn't for the dead. That was one of the things he had learned in his years working homicide. It's no use fighting a crusade for a corpse. It will still be a corpse even if somebody turns its killer into a corpse, too. But the family, the loved ones, *the living*—they can be helped.

He chose a file and left.

10:07 A.M.:

Unlike most of the older, lower-middle-class neighborhoods around

town, Pine Hills actually lived up to its name. It had both pines and hills, though not many of either. It also had a reputation among Erie's fellow cops for producing wild kids. On Halloween night patrol cars cruised through the neighborhood as if it were Compton or Watts, and EMT crews waited on stand-by for the inevitable wounds from bottle rockets, M-80's, broken glass, and exploding mailboxes.

O'Hara Drive was a short crooked sloping street in the heart of the neighborhood. It was all of one block long, bracketed on each side by longer streets that curved up to the neighborhood's highest hills. From the top of one you could see the airport just a mile away. From the other you could see the county dump.

The house at 1701 O'Hara Drive wasn't just where Joel Korfmann, insurance salesman, had lived. It was where he had died, too. There were two vehicles in the driveway when Erie arrived—a silver, mid-'90's model Ford Taurus and a newer Ford pickup, red. The Taurus he remembered.

He parked at the curb and walked toward the house. All the curtains had been drawn shut. A big plastic trashcan lay on its side near the foot of the driveway.

He rang the doorbell. And waited. He knocked on the rickety metal of the screen door. The curtains in the front window fluttered, and a woman's face hovered in the shadows beyond. Erie tried to smile reassuringly. He pulled out his badge.

"It's Detective Erie, Mrs. Korfmann."

The face disappeared. Erie waited again. Finally the front door opened. The screen door in front of it remained closed.

All the lights of the house were off. Candace Korfmann stood back from the door, away from the sunlight. "Hello."

"Hello, Mrs. Korfmann. I'm just dropping by this morning to ask a few followup questions. Is now a good time to talk?"

"Sure," she replied lifelessly. She was dressed in a bathrobe. Erie recalled that she was what people used to call a housewife or homemaker. She didn't have a job to give her life focus again after her husband died. And she didn't have any children to keep her busy, keep her mind from dwelling on the past, on what had happened in her own kitchen. He pictured her brooding in the darkness of the little white house all day every day, alone.

"Good," Erie said. "First off, I'm afraid I have to tell you that we haven't uncovered any new leads. But we're putting a new investigator on the case next week, Detective David Rogers. So don't lose hope, Mrs. Korfmann. He's a good man."

After a moment's pause she nodded. "Okay, I won't."

"Good. Now, second, I was wondering if there was anything new you could tell me—any new memories or thoughts you've had that might help our investigation."

Mrs. Korfmann stared at him impassively. Standing in the shadows, perfectly still, she looked flat, one-dimensional, like the mere outline of a woman. Her shape—the slumped shoulders and tousled hair and

slightly tilted head—reminded him of Nancy toward the end, when she was so weak she could barely stand.

"It could be anything, even just a rumor going around the neighborhood," he prompted. "Every little bit helps, Mrs. Korfmann."

She shook her head slowly. "I don't know what to tell you. I haven't heard a thing."

"That's okay. No reason you should do our job for us. I have just one more thing to talk to you about." He pulled a card from his jacket pocket. "I'd like to give you this. It's the number of a woman I know. She runs a group for . . . those who've been left behind. A survivor support group. You might want to give her a call."

Mrs. Korfmann didn't move for a long moment. Then she opened the door and reached out to take the card. As she leaned into the light, Erie could see that her skin was pale, her eyes hollow. He noticed a slight swelling in her lower lip and a dark, bluish smudge of bruised flesh under her left eye.

"Thanks," she said.

"Sure. You take care now, Mrs. Korfmann."

She nodded, then closed the door.

10:24 A.M.:

Erie started his car. The digital clock on the dashboard came to life. Not even an hour back on the Korfmann case, and already he was done. He had driven across town just to stir up painful memories for a sad and lonely woman. There was nothing to do now but head back to the office and shoot the breeze with whoever he could find lounging

around. Reminisce about the good old days, trot out old stories and legends, do nothing. Then go home.

He shut off the ignition and got out of the car. He walked to the house across from 1701 O'Hara Drive and rang the doorbell. An old man opened the door. He was wearing glasses so thick Erie couldn't see his eyes, just big, shimmering ovals of pale blue.

"Yes?"

Erie took out his badge. "Good morning, Mr. Wallender. I'm Detective Erie. You and I spoke about ten months ago."

The old man bent forward to peer at the badge. "Of course I remember you, detective. Come on in." He shuffled ahead of Erie into the next room. "You have a seat there and I'll get some coffee." He disappeared around a corner. "I've got some on the stove. Every day I make a pot of coffee and drink two cups. I don't know why I keep doing that. I pour more coffee down the drain in a morning than most people drink in a week." Erie could hear cabinet doors and drawers opening and closing, porcelain sliding over counter-tops, the hum of an open refrigerator.

"I'll just take mine black, Mr. Wallender," he called.

"Have you arrested Joel Korfmann's killer yet?"

"Not yet. That's why I'm here. I'm making a few followup inquiries."

Wallender shuffled into the living room with a mug in each hand. He gave one to Erie. The liquid in it had the tell-tale hue of coffee with skim milk. Erie didn't take a sip.

"I was wondering if you'd heard

or seen anything else that might have a bearing on the case."

Wallender lowered himself slowly into a recliner. "I've been keeping my eye on the neighborhood kids. They're always planning some kind of prank. I called the police a couple of months ago. Thought I saw a boy with some dynamite. A policeman came out. Do you know an Officer Pyke?"

"Yes, I do." The old man's vision and hearing might be shaky, but his memory was fine. "Have you spoken to Mrs. Korfmann at all? Do you know how she's doing?"

Wallender brought his mug to his lips, his hands trembling badly.

"She kind of dropped out of sight for a while there. I figured she went to be with her family or some such," the old man said. "She was gone maybe two months. When she came back, she seemed to be doing fine. I took it upon myself to drop in and chat with her from time to time."

"And her state of mind seemed good?"

Wallender shrugged. "Far as I could tell. They were always standoffish people, her and her husband both. She seemed a little friendlier for a while there, but then her young man began hanging around and she was the same old Candace again."

"Her young man? You mean she has a boyfriend?"

"I guess you could call him that, seeing as how his truck's there most nights."

"And how long has this been going on?"

"Maybe two months, maybe a little longer." Wallender's thin, trembling lips curled into a sly smile.

"Now, don't go thinking evil thoughts, Detective Erie. She needed a man around, so she found one. It's understandable. People get lonely. I know a little something about that. It's not easy living alone."

Erie tried to smile back but found he couldn't. His mouth, his whole face, felt stiff, dead. "I'm not thinking evil thoughts, Mr. Wallender. I'm just curious. That's my job."

"Sure, sure. I understand. I guess I'm curious, too. Except when it's a neighbor being curious, people call it nosy."

"Have you ever spoken to Mrs. Korfmann's young man?"

"Well, I've tried. He's not a very talkative fella. I've been over to chat once or twice when I noticed him out working on his truck. He didn't have a lot to say. Actually, he reminds me a lot of Joel—Mr. Korfmann."

"Did you happen to catch his name?"

"Ray. He didn't mention his last name. He works over at DeRogatis Ford as a mechanic." The old man grinned again. "That's all I got out of him, chief. If you want me to try again, maybe I could get his Social Security number for you."

Erie finally found himself able to smile back. "You're a real character, Mr. Wallender."

"I certainly am," the old man said with obvious pride. "I just wish more people knew it."

10:43 A.M.:

Erie was back in his car, faced again with the drive to the station, spending the afternoon killing time, the evening killing time, the week-

end killing time, the years killing time until time finally killed him.

He thought about Candace Korfmann. Her dead-eyed stare, the way she had stayed away from the light, the black eye. He tried not to think evil thoughts about Ray. But he couldn't stop himself. Good cops and social workers can smell abuse a mile away, and Erie had caught a whiff of something in the air around 1701 O'Hara Drive. Maybe he couldn't catch a killer in one day, but he sure as hell could sniff out a woman-beater. What he would do about it, he wasn't sure.

He started his car and put it in gear. As he pulled away from the curb, he noticed movement in one of the windows of the Korfmann house—a dark shape quickly replaced by the swaying of a blind. Someone had been watching him.

He drove to the intersection of Oak Hill Road and Highway 41, home of DeRogatis Ford.

11:10 A.M.:

A salesman swooped down on Erie before he could step out of his car.

"Good afternoon there! What can I help you with today?"

Erie flipped out his badge. "I'd like to have a word with whoever runs your mechanics' shop."

Sweat instantly materialized on the salesman's forehead.

"Don't worry. I'm just making a routine inquiry."

The salesman still looked panic-stricken.

"It has nothing to do with DeRogatis Ford," Erie added. "I'm trying to locate someone who may be an

employee. He's not in any trouble. Like I said, it's very routine."

The salesman nodded and gave Erie an unconvincing smile. "Sure, officer. We're always happy to help River City's finest. Right this way."

The salesman led him through the showroom to a bustling garage. About eight cars were being worked on, some with their hoods up, some on hydraulic lifts. Off to the side customers lounged in a waiting room watching *The Jerry Springer Show*. The salesman pointed out a short, middle-aged Asian man leaning over an Escort's engine.

"That's Frank Takarada. He runs things back here." The salesman slipped a business card out of his shirt pocket. "If you ever want to talk cars, I'm your man. I'm here Tuesday through Saturday." He shook Erie's hand and hustled away.

Erie pocketed the card and headed toward Takarada. The mechanic noticed his approach and eyed him warily.

"Mr. Takarada, could I have a word with you, please?"

"I'm very busy. Maybe later."

Sometimes the badge-flash routine got quick results, sometimes—especially in public places when plenty of people were around—it just irritated or embarrassed people. Takarada looked like the irritable type. Erie leaned close and lowered his voice. "I'm a police detective, Mr. Takarada. I promise that I only need five minutes of your time. Do you have an office where we can speak?"

Takarada pulled a greasy rag out of one pocket and began wiping off

his hands. "Come on," he grunted. He led Erie to a back corner of the garage. Auto parts in plastic bags hung from pegs on a large partition. Takarada stepped around it. Erie followed, finding a makeshift office complete with desk, computer terminal, fan, and filing cabinets covered with crinkled paperwork. A large board studded with pegs hung on the wall. Car keys dangled from the pegs.

"So what do you want?" Takarada said.

"I'd like to know if you have a mechanic here by the name of Ray or Raymond."

"Nope."

Erie felt foolish. He had followed up a blind hunch, something that had nothing to do with his job, based on the memory of a doddering old recluse. He was about to apologize and leave when Takarada spoke again.

"Not any more. Had one a few months ago, though. Ray Long."

"What happened?"

"We had to let him go," Takarada said with mock gentility. He didn't volunteer anything further.

"This is off the record, Mr. Takarada. Just between you and me. You can be plainspoken."

"Okay," said Takarada, who seemed glad to have permission to be blunt. "He's an ass. Always was. I put up with him for two years and then—" He mimed dropping a ball and punting it.

"When was this?"

"Six weeks, maybe two months ago, something like that."

"What happened?"

"Instead of being late once or

twice a week, he was late every day. Instead of being hungover some of the time, he was hungover all of the time."

"How did he react when you fired him?"

Takarada laughed bitterly. "Typical macho b.s." His voice suddenly took on a Southern Indiana twang. "Oh yeah, man? Well, I don't need this stupid job, anyway! I'm set up, man! So screw you!"

Erie's fingers and toes began to tingle the way they always did when he sensed a break. He forced himself to relax before he spoke again. "He said, 'I'm set up'?"

"Something like that, yeah."

"Can you tell me if a Candace Korfmann had her car serviced in this shop in the last few months? She drives a silver Taurus, looks like a '95 or '96."

The mechanic looked annoyed. "I'd have to look that up."

"I would appreciate that, Mr. Takarada. It's very important."

Takarada sighed heavily. "How do you spell that?" He walked back to the computer terminal and took a seat.

Erie's mind was racing ahead of Takarada as he typed. The dealership's records would show that Candace Korfmann had brought her car in about two months ago, maybe three. Raymond Long had worked on the car. He had noticed her waiting—she wasn't an unattractive woman. He took her over to show her something, began flirting. He could sense that she was vulnerable. He got her to agree to a date. He found out she was a widow. Her husband had been an insurance

agent. She had received a large amount of money upon his death. Raymond Long saw an opportunity. He wormed his way into her heart, then her home. Now he thought he ran the show. Erie would figure out a way to prove him wrong.

"Yeah, we've got a Candace Korfmann in here. Drives a 1995 Taurus, like you said."

"Does it show who worked on her car last?"

"Sure. Got the initials right here. R.L."

Erie nodded with satisfaction. "Raymond Long. This was around June or July?"

"Not even close."

"What?"

Takarada turned away from the computer. "Try May—of last year."

Erie stared at the mechanic blankly, his mind racing. His pet theory was blown.

Within seconds another one started to take its place.

He gestured at the key rack on the wall. "These are for the cars you're working on?"

"And the ones waiting out back, yeah."

"You ever work on vans here?"

Takarada shrugged. "Sure, every now and then."

Erie mulled that over for a moment. "Anything else?" Takarada was obviously anxious to get back to work.

"If you could print that out for me, I'd appreciate it." Before Takarada could groan or sigh or roll his eyes, Erie added, "Then I'll be leaving. You've been a big help. Thanks."

Takarada started to swivel back

to the keyboard, then stopped himself. "So, can you tell me? Is Long in some kind of trouble?"

Erie gave the safe cop answer: "No, this is just a routine inquiry." But he knew trouble was headed Raymond Long's way. Erie hoped to deliver it himself before the day was over.

11:44 A.M.:

Erie ate lunch at a Denny's across the street from the Ford dealership. A few too many people were probably expecting him to drop by Peppy's, the diner around the corner from police headquarters. But he wanted a chance to think.

His turkey club and fries went down untasted. The file on Joel Korfmann's murder was spread across the table before him.

Erie was pleased to see that the report was neat, thorough, precise. He'd put it together himself months before.

On New Year's Eve, at approximately nine fifteen P.M., Joel Korfmann had been bludgeoned to death in his home. The victim, age forty-one, was a Lutheran Family Insurance representative who had spent the day making calls on potential customers. In the evening he had been at the office doing paperwork. (In parentheses after this information were the words "Indicative of victim's character?" Those were code words. What they meant was, "What kind of jerk makes cold calls selling insurance on New Year's Eve? Then spends the evening doing paperwork when he could be with family and friends?") Security surveillance tapes showed that he

left work at eight forty-three P.M. It would have taken him about half an hour to drive home.

The victim's wife, Candace Lane Korfmann, age thirty-eight, spent the evening with her sister, Carol Lane Biggs, and brother-in-law, Rudy Biggs. Witnesses placed them at the Dew Drop Inn on Division Street from eight thirty P.M. until approximately twelve thirty A.M.

Carol and Rudy Biggs drove Candace Korfmann home, arriving at twelve fifty-five. All three entered the house. Mrs. Korfmann immediately noticed that several items—a GoldStar television, a Sony VCR, a Sony stereo—were missing. In the kitchen Rudy Biggs discovered the body of Joel Korfmann. He had been hit from behind by a large, heavy object. Forensics later concluded that he had been hit five times with the butt of his own shotgun, which was also reported missing.

Most of the Korfmanns' neighbors had been away for the evening celebrating the holiday. But a James Wallender, an elderly man who lived by himself across the street, reported seeing a dark van parked on the street near the house at approximately eight thirty P.M. Later, Wallender said, he saw it in the Korfmanns' driveway. (In parentheses here: "Witness seems anxious to help investigation." That was Erie's way of hinting that the old man might not be the most reliable witness. Sometimes lonely people were so eager to please they would "remember" things they'd never seen.)

The report concluded that the victim had surprised someone in the house—an individual or individu-

als in the process of burglarizing it. Seeing the house dark on a holiday, the perpetrators must have assumed the residents were out of town or would be out all night partying. It was a common scenario.

There had been no evidence when Erie had written his report. There were no fingerprints, no hairs, no tire tracks that could be linked to the crime, and the stolen items had never surfaced. And that hadn't changed. Erie still had no evidence. But he did have something new—a hunch.

Driving back to headquarters after lunch, his mind dwelled on Raymond Long. He pictured him as a young long-haired redneck with muscular arms and fiery eyes. He pictured him killing Joel Korfmann. He pictured him beating Candace Korfmann, finally killing her in a rage—or just because it suited him.

He saw it all, crystal clear in his mind. Long the manipulator, Long the killer. Joel and Candace Korfmann, the victims.

The only thing that interrupted these thoughts was a stray one that crept in from another part of his brain as he maneuvered through afternoon traffic. It was the image of cars and trucks whipping up and down Green River Road, leaving roadkill behind them on the asphalt, on the side of the road, tumbling into ditches. He hoped the little black cat was safe.

1:10 P.M.:

At headquarters Erie checked to see if "Long, Raymond" had a criminal record. He wasn't disappointed. There were three charges of dis-

turbing the peace, two charges of battery, two disorderly conducts, one assault, and the inevitable DWI and resisting arrest. Over the years he had served a grand total of fifteen months in the Vanderburgh County lockup.

The pictures came as a surprise, though. Long was thirty-seven, and he looked every day of it. He was balding, pug-nosed, and jowly. He didn't look like the kind of handsome young devil who could charm a vulnerable widow—or widow-to-be. Erie assumed he was one hell of a talker.

Erie went back to his office (accepting a number of handshakes and pats on the back on the way) and began calling all the U-Stor-Its and Storage Lands in town. The people he spoke with knew him, knew what he was looking for, knew the drill, but they couldn't help. No, they hadn't rented space to a Raymond Long in the last year. Yes, they'd give him a call if a Raymond Long came in.

After saying "Thanks, have a good one" for the eighth time, Erie hung up the phone and left his office. It was time to have a talk with Raymond Long.

2:17 P.M.:

There was something different at 1701 O'Hara Drive when Erie pulled up. He walked toward the house slowly, trying to pin down what it was.

The curtains were still drawn shut. The Taurus and the pickup were still parked out front. The trashcan still lay on its side in the yard.

He was walking up the driveway past the pickup when he realized what it was. The truck was splattered with mud—mud that hadn't been there that morning. Erie crossed the street and rang James Wallender's doorbell.

"Hello there, chief," the old man said as he opened the door. "I was wondering if you'd come back again. Why don't you come in?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Wallender, I don't have time to visit right now. I just wanted to ask if you'd seen any activity at the Korfmann house today."

"Well, I might have peeked out the window a time or two since you were here." Wallender winked. "Hold on a minute." He shuffled away, then returned a moment later with a small notepad clutched in one trembling hand. "You left here at approximately ten forty-five A.M. Around eleven that fella Ray pulled his truck into the garage and brought the garage door down. At eleven twenty he drove out again and was gone for a while."

"Was there anything in the pickup when he left?"

"Yeah. Something big and green."

"Green?"

Wallender checked his notepad. "Yes, green. At least that's what it looked like to me." He tapped his eyeglasses. "I have to look at everything through these Coke bottles."

"Could it have been a tarp thrown over something in the back of the truck?"

Wallender nodded. "Sure, it could have been."

"And how long was Ray gone?"

Wallender looked at his notepad again. "Forty-five minutes."

Erie extended a hand. Wallender shook it. "Mr. Wallender, by the power vested in me by the state of Indiana, I hereby declare you a junior G-man."

Wallender smiled. "I always said I wanted to be a detective when I grew up."

3:10 P.M.:

The shoes Erie had shined so carefully that morning were now covered with mud, coffee grounds, and mysterious flecks of filth. His trousers were similarly splattered, and there was a new rip where a piece of jagged metal had snagged his pants leg. Even his tie was beginning to smell bad.

Early on, there had been two other scavengers, a heavysset couple with prodigious guts spilling out from under their dirty T-shirts. They'd seen him—a well-dressed, middle-aged man picking through piles of garbage at the county dump—and stared as if he were some exotic, dangerous animal pacing back and forth in a cage at the zoo. They kept their distance, eventually driving off in a beat-up station wagon loaded with discarded toys and clothes and broken appliances.

Erie told himself he'd only look for another half hour. If he couldn't find anything, he'd head back down to Pine Hills and have that talk with Raymond Long. Not that he was going to make much of an impression in his current condition. Maybe after another thirty minutes wading through garbage he would smell so putrid Long would confess just to get away from him.

The ridiculousness of it made him

long for Nancy. He wanted to go home and tell her everything that had happened. He couldn't even tell if his last day had been sad, funny, triumphant, or disastrous without her face to gauge it by.

From off in the distance came the popping and clicking of tires rolling over gravel. More scavengers were headed up the winding back road to the dump. Erie was going to be on exhibit again. He thought about abandoning his crazy theory and just going home for a nice long bath.

And then he found it. It was underneath a big flattened-out cardboard box, the kind washing machines are delivered in. A GoldStar TV. The screen had been broken in and the plastic cracked on top, but it was relatively free of mud and grime. Erie checked the back. Even though someone had made a half-hearted effort to bust up the television and make it look old, they hadn't bothered scratching off the serial number.

Erie tore into the nearest pile of garbage, tossing trash bags and boxes aside with manic energy. At the bottom he found a Sony VCR, the top crushed as if someone had jumped on top of it. He picked it up and looked at the back. Again, the serial number was still there.

It only took him another minute of digging to find the stereo. It was nearby, underneath a pile of newspapers. It had hardly been damaged at all. There was still a serial number on the back.

That left just one item—the most important of all. Once he found that, he could call in the evidence techs to dust everything for prints

and look for tracks that matched the tires on Raymond Long's truck. The tracks would have to be nearby. Erie turned around to look.

Raymond Long was walking toward him. "Is this what you're looking for?" he said.

He was holding a shotgun. It was pointed at Erie. His finger was on the trigger.

In the time it took Long to take two more steps Erie had considered five different options: dive and roll and draw his gun; charge Long and go for the shotgun; put up his hands and feign ignorance; put up his hands and try to talk Long into surrendering; run like crazy. Those few seconds were all Erie needed to realize that all his options stank. But he picked one anyway. He put up his hands and started talking.

"Don't do anything dumb, Ray. A lot of people know where I am. If anything happens to me, they're going to know exactly who to point the finger at."

Long stopped about seven yards from Erie. At that range there was little doubt what outcome a shotgun blast would have.

"Yeah, well, maybe by the time they're pointing fingers, I'll be hundreds of miles away." His voice was full of spiteful good ol' boy bravado. But Erie could see the sweat shining on his face, the damp rings that were spreading under the armpits of his T-shirt.

Erie shook his head. "You won't make it. Wherever you try to go. Cop killers never get away. Other cops take it too personally. You'll end up right back in Indiana facing a capital murder charge."

"Don't you mean *two* capital murder charges?" Long sneered. He had a good face for sneering. It looked like he'd done a lot of practicing over the years.

"You should stop talking, Ray. You should put down the shotgun and let me take you in. That's what a lawyer would tell you to do. You haven't crossed the line yet—you haven't doomed yourself. If you put the gun down now, this could all still work out for you and Candace."

Erie knew instantly that he'd made a mistake. As soon as he'd said Candace, Long's sneer had turned into a scowl of rage. Erie had pushed the wrong button. Now he had to get out of the way.

Erie threw himself to the left, twisting in mid-flight so he'd take most of the buckshot in the back, buttocks, or legs instead of the face and chest. There was a boom, and a searing pain lanced his side. But it wasn't bad enough to stop him. He rolled over and came up with his gun pointing toward Long.

But Long wasn't standing there any more. He was lying on the ground. Erie watched him for a second, stunned. Long wasn't moving.

Erie stood up and winced as a bolt of agony struck in a familiar place: his gymnastics had strained his cranky lower back. He limped toward Long, each step sending pain shooting up his spine.

Long was a mess. And he was dead.

Erie guessed that he'd bent the shotgun's barrel or jammed the chamber when he bludgeoned Joel Korfmann. He might even have used the stock to bust up the TV,

VCR, and stereo. So when he tried to shoot Erie, the shotgun had exploded, sending shards of metal and wood out in all directions—but mostly into Long's body.

Erie checked the right side of his abdomen where he'd felt the sting a moment before. He'd been wounded but not by buckshot or shrapnel. His shirt was torn, and a short, shallow gash was bleeding onto the white cotton. When he'd jumped, he'd landed on something sharp.

He began walking very, very slowly to his car, trying to remember the last time he'd had a tetanus shot.

3:55 P.M.:

A patrol car was waiting for him at 1701 O'Hara Drive when he arrived as he had requested from the dispatcher.

"Geez, Larry, where did the tornado touch down?" one of the officers asked as he limped to their car.

"Right on top of me. Can't you tell?"

"What's the story?" the other cop asked.

"I need to pick somebody up for questioning. I'm not expecting any trouble, but I wanted a little back-up just in case. You two just hang back and observe."

"Hang back and observe," the first cop said, giving Erie a salute. "That's what I do best."

Erie walked up to the house and rang the doorbell. Candace Korfmann opened the door almost immediately.

"I've been waiting for you," she said. She was wearing jeans and a River City Community College sweatshirt. "I'm ready to go."

She stepped outside, closed the front door, and brushed past Erie.

"That's you, right?" she said, pointing at Erie's car.

"Yes."

She walked to the car quickly. Erie followed her.

"Do you want me in the front or the back?" she asked.

"The front is fine."

Mrs. Korfmann opened the door and climbed in. Erie eased himself gingerly into the driver's seat and started the engine. He gave the cops watching from their patrol car an "everything's under control" wave.

"I hope you weren't hurt," Mrs. Korfmann said as Erie pulled away from the curb.

"You're not under arrest, Mrs. Korfmann. I'm taking you in for an interview, that's all. You don't have to say anything if you don't want to."

"Is he dead?"

Erie took his eyes off the road for a moment to watch her. "Yes, Raymond Long is dead. He was killed about half an hour ago."

She grunted. A long stretch of road rolled by in silence.

"It was his own fault," she suddenly announced. "He killed himself when he pulled that trigger." She didn't look at Erie as she spoke. She stared straight ahead, unblinking.

"What do you mean?"

"I filled the barrel with caulk last week." She was still staring at nothing, but tears had begun to trickle down her cheeks. "I was afraid he was going to use it on me."

"He was abusive?"

"Yes."

Erie stole another glance at her. The tears were still flowing, but her face was impassive, blank. "He was your lover," he said.

"Yes."

"He killed your husband."

"Yes," she replied without hesitating.

"He used a van from DeRogatis Ford to fake a burglary."

"Yes."

"He kept the things he took from your house and brought them with him when he moved in with you."

"Yes." She spat out the word this time. "That idiot."

"Will you repeat all this when we reach police headquarters? In a formal statement?"

"Yes."

Another mile rolled under the wheels before Erie spoke again. "Why did you go along with it?" he said. "Did you love him?"

Mrs. Korfmann finally turned to face him. That morning she had reminded him, just a bit, of Nancy. But whatever resemblance he had seen in her then was gone now, crushed with the rest of her spirit.

"Joel used to beat me, too," she said. "Ray said he would protect me."

5:25 P.M.:

She repeated everything on the record, just as she said she would. Erie stayed in the interrogation room only long enough to make sure it was all on tape. But he left Dave Rogers to prepare her statement and get a signature. He simply stood up and said, "I'm tired, Dave," and walked out.

Hal Allen was waiting for him

outside. "I'd never have guessed it," Allen said. "You've been holding out on us all these years. If I'd known you could wrap up a murder case every day, I never would have let you retire."

"Too late now, boss," Erie replied. "All right if I go home?"

"In a second. I wanted to see you at the end of the day, remember?"

"Oh, right. I guess you need this." Erie slipped his badge-clip, off his belt and handed it to Allen. "And this." He unholstered his revolver and handed that over, too.

"Well, yeah, we need those." Allen slipped the items into his jacket pocket. "But that's not what I wanted to see you about. Do you still carry cards for Julie Rhodes, the grief counselor?"

"Um-hmm."

"Could I see one?" Erie pulled out one of the cards. He handed it to Allen, who looked at it for a moment before handing it back.

"Here," Allen said. "I think you should use this."

5:50 P.M.:

Erie stopped at a grocery store on the way home. He found the cheapest red wine in stock and put four bottles in his cart.

But on the way to the register he changed his mind.

He found the aisle marked Pet Supplies and threw a bag of kitty litter and a dozen cans of cat food into his cart. He left three bottles of wine on the shelf next to the "cat treats."

When he got home, he opened one of the cans of cat food and dumped its contents onto a small plate. He took the plate out to the front porch along with his wine, a glass, and a bottle opener. He placed the plate on the walk that led to the driveway, then eased himself down on the first step of his porch.

He opened the wine and waited.

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FICTION

GREEN RIVER CHANTEY

Alexander C. Irvine



On March 18, 1929, the day after his twelfth birthday, Ray Cady Junior sat shivering on a fallen tree that sloped down into the smooth waters of the Green River. He'd been outside two hours now, and the night air was sucking the heat from him. At least winter was over, and hints of cave-country spring were starting to show up in garden plots and on tree branches.

The fat bright face of the moon was reflected in the still water, along with a few stars that disappeared at any tiny ripple caused by bug or fish. Behind Ray Junior a narrow tributary stream led to Echo River Spring, where water from the lower levels of Mammoth Cave drained into the Green River on its meandering way to the Ohio. All that way, he thought, from here to west of Owensboro where the Green meets the Ohio, then down to Cairo, Illinois, where the Ohio meets the Mississippi, then all the way to New Orleans and out to sea. How far was that? And that was just the water on the surface; Ray knew there were at least two rivers in the lower levels of the cave, Echo and River Styx. Nobody knew where they went, and if you could go from Mammoth Cave to New Orleans on the surface, maybe you could do it underground, too. Maybe you could even go as far as Gloucester, Massachusetts, where Grandma Ware had come from.

The names of all those places fascinated Ray, who had never been to any of them. But he'd seen them all on the big map at the school in Rowletts before Dad said he had to stop going and start working around the house and over at Floyd Collins' Crystal Cave.

"You're a tall one for twelve anyway," Dad said. "Tourists'll think you're older than your age."

Ray didn't have much use for the caves; Floyd Collins' glass-topped coffin and the crystals shining from the walls and the faint drip of water back among the dark rocks made him wish for the deep, soft green of the hills in daylight. He shifted on the tree trunk, leaning into the up-turned tangle of roots that served as a chair back, and the harmonica in his pocket poked him in the hip. His feet dangled above water on either side of the tree.

The river had risen with early spring, and they hadn't yet released the water through the dam downstream at Brownsville. He looked around carefully even though he knew nobody would come looking for him. Pa was stupid drunk at home, and Ma wouldn't leave while he was in such a condition, at least not while there was a chance he would wake up so she could holler at him. She'd stay up all night reading Bible verses out loud, then kick Pa out the door in time to make the first tour in the morning.

So nobody would have noticed that the harmonica, which Pa had gotten for Ray Junior's birthday and Ma had thrown away amid a storm of Baptist righteousness, had found its way back into the pocket of Ray Junior's dungarees. Neither would they have noticed that Ray Junior had

found his way out of the house and into his fallen-tree chair by the river.

He pulled the harmonica from his pocket and brushed lint away into the shadowed water under his feet. The moon shone almost bright enough to read the engraved HOHNER as Ray Junior traced the letters with his fingers. He brought the harmonica to his mouth and blew into it, savoring the reedy tones. An actual musical instrument, and it was his. The thing was to keep it hidden from Ma.

Ray tried to think of a tune to play, one that he knew all the way through. Not a lullaby, nor a hymn neither. He was stumped until he looked up into the night sky and remembered a tune that Grandma Ware used to whistle while she hung out the laundry or quilted by the stove next to Grandpa's wooden leg. He'd never learned the words, but Grandma Ware had told him the tune was a sea chantey about watching the stars. In the song you picked a star when your man went to sea, and if the star went behind a cloud while you were looking, it meant your man wouldn't survive the voyage. Ray wondered why the sailors' women hadn't just not sung the song on cloudy nights.

He had always meant to learn the words to the chantey, especially since Grandpa Ware had actually been lost at sea, but Grandma Ware had died three months ago without ever teaching him.

Ray fitted the harp to his mouth again and picked the notes out one by one, gradually stringing them into a mournful line as he watched the stars on the surface of the river. As he played the line all the way through for the first time, he saw a ripple break the reflected stars into a million dancing slivers, and then something seized his ankle and jerked him off the tree into the dark water.

A weird, gurgling laugh echoed in the water as Ray struggled to get his feet under him. He stood up in the waist-deep water, shaking with fear and the shock of the cold river, and grabbed hold of a tree branch to haul himself up onto the bank. Then he noticed a pale knobby hand thrust out of the water. Holding his harmonica.

The laughing stopped as a head appeared next to the hand, its eyes shrunken away into empty sockets, its nose eaten away. "Good thing I caught the harp, lad," spoke the head. "I don't know how well they work wet."

A salty, fishy stink assailed Ray Junior as he stood gaping at the head. Spots covered the mostly bald scalp, and a few strands of hair straggled into the water around a face that was wrinkled and swollen at the same time. Like a prune, Ma would have said.

"Take it, lad," the head urged. It smiled, exposing three teeth and a long strand of river grass stuck to pale gums. The hand moved towards Ray, who made no move to take the harmonica.

"Go on, I kept it dry for ye." Somehow that made sense; Ray reached gingerly to take the harp from the bony hand. He started to put it back

in his pocket, then remembered he was still standing in the river. As he stood wondering what to do with it, the hand disappeared and the head leaned back, barely keeping its face above water.

"Ha. So there it is," it said, and the hand reappeared holding a sodden wool cap.

It was hard to be afraid of an apparition that lost its hat while dragging you into the river. "Is the water a lot deeper where you are?" Ray asked.

The head didn't answer until, with the aid of a second hand, the cap was adjusted at a jaunty, crooked angle. "No," it said then, "the water ain't any deeper here. I just have a bit of trouble standing up. Give a hand, will ye?" it finished, holding out both hands.

"I don't know," Ray said doubtfully.

"Come on, Ray," the head cajoled. "Yer name is Ray, ain't it, after yer drunk of a father?" It squinted at him, an unnerving effect in the absence of eyeballs.

"Well, yessir," Ray said. "But I don't guess you need to talk about my daddy that way if you're asking me to help you up."

"If he's my damned son-in-law, I guess I can," the head answered petulantly. "Come on, boy, now that yer grandmother's dead I need to get my leg back."

It all finally dawned on Ray. He looked at the harmonica, then up at the thick canopy of stars, then back at the walking—well, swimming—ghost of his Grandpa Ware. "Grandpa," he said as he hauled the one-legged apparition upright, "that might not be too easy."

Jewel Breedlove had barely poured his morning coffee and gotten his feet up on Sheriff Knox's desk when Edwina Cady came thrashing in out of the rain in a raincoat several sizes too small and told him that someone had stolen Floyd Collins' leg.

"Just his leg?" Jewel asked, taken aback by the sight of Edwina wearing Ray's raincoat. It was like something out of Barney Google. Edwina outweighed Ray by a good fifty pounds, all put on since she'd married. Jewel wondered what she would have looked like if she'd married him.

Edwina's entire body puckered into a threatening scowl, the air of menace even spreading to the drooping flowers in her hatband as she transfixed him with a gaze of hemlock-pure contempt. "No, Jewel, they took all of him from the coffin," she said. "But when we found him this morning, he was missing one leg."

The clock on the wall of the Edmonson County sheriff's department read nine thirty-three. "You found him this morning?" Jewel repeated.

Edwina straightened, tugged at the soggy remains of her hat, and emitted her most forbearant and patronizing sigh. "Must really be coming down out there," Jewel remarked. It wouldn't hurt to be civil, and she sure wouldn't take the trouble if he didn't.

Then again, Jewel thought, if it was me married to Ray Cady, I wouldn't be sweetness and light either. It was a damn shame; when he'd sparked fifteen-year-old Edwina Ware before the war, he'd been sure they'd end up together. But then the war got in the way, and Jewel had come back in the spring of 1918 to find Edwina with a baby and a new last name.

He'd been hurt about it, and told her so, and then they hadn't spoken for a while. But now Jewel mostly just felt sorry for her. Ray Cady hadn't started out mean and he hadn't been a drunk, but he'd always been lazy and he'd picked up the rest when he found out that his new wife was smarter than he was and not afraid to let him know it.

"Jewel," Edwina said, snapping him out of his woolgathering. "Do you plan on asking me any relevant questions, or should I wait for Knox?"

"Guess it'll have to be me. Knox is visiting his people in Detroit, and he'd just make me do it anyway." Jewel flipped open his notebook and found a pencil in his shirt pocket. He gnawed on the pencil's eraser, resisting the urge to light a Lucky—as he normally did when taking a deposition—out of fear of Edwina's Baptist-whetted tongue.

"All right. When was the body found?"

"I told you, this morning. And I guess it'll be gone again by the time you get around to doing anything."

"Edwina, the man's four years dead, and he only has one leg. I don't reckon he'll go far. What time this morning and who found him?"

"Do you mind if I sit?" Jewel looked up. The hostility had drained suddenly from Edwina's face as if she no longer had the energy to maintain it. He indicated the chair in front of the sheriff's desk, and she sat.

"Ray found the casket empty at about five this morning, I guess," Edwina began, but Jewel interrupted.

"'Scuse me, Edwina, but what was Ray doing in the cave—hell, anywhere awake—at five in the morning?"

"He went in early to work on the tourist trails," she said icily. So much for civility, Jewel thought. He wrote RAY 5 A.M. in the notebook, circled it, and surrounded it with question marks. Ray getting up early to work on Crystal Cave's trails was about as likely as Floyd Collins walking back from wherever they'd found him. The only reason Jewel could see Ray up and around that early was to raid one of his guides' liquor caches back in the cave somewhere.

"So Ray saw Floyd's body was gone. Where did he find it?"

"He didn't. I did, down by—by Echo River Spring." Edwina fluttered a hand under her chin, indicating a catch in her throat.

"Minus a leg."

"Minus a leg."

"How about his tooth?" Floyd Collins had sported a gold front tooth. It was the only reason Jewel could think of for outsiders to actually steal the body. But with all the caves in the area fighting over the same tour-

ist dollars . . . hmm. Jewel made a note to talk to the Mammoth Cave people, and the new folks running Horse Cave and Onyx Cave.

"I couldn't tell. His mouth was still sewed shut."

"And you didn't find the leg?"

"No, Jewel, I didn't. I thought that was your job."

Here we go again, thought Jewel. "All right, so Ray found the casket open, came and told you, and the two of you went looking for the body?"

"Yes. Ray Junior came, too, so there was three of us."

It was five minutes by car from the Cady house to Crystal Cave. If Ray had gone down at five o'clock, he could have discovered the theft and been back by five thirty. But it was three miles from Crystal Cave to Echo River Spring, over hills and through forest in the dark, and you couldn't search woods from a car. Then back to the cave, back to the house, and eleven miles on the state road to Brownsville, and all of this in time for Edwina to be sharpening her tongue on Deputy Breedlove by nine thirty. Jewel thought about the edge in Edwina's voice and filed all of it away for later.

"Did the thieves leave a trail?" he asked. Best to play it formal until he had a better idea of what was going on; on the other hand, though, he was starting to think he had a pretty good inkling right then.

"They did, one you could follow in the dark." Point for you, Edwina, Jewel thought. "It went as close to straight as it could, all the way to Echo River Spring."

"Was the body in the water?" Did embalmed bodies sink? Jewel didn't know.

"No, on the bank with just its feet—foot, I mean—in the water," Edwina said. "Lord, Jewel, you could see it yourself if you'd bestir your lazy backside from Knox's chair."

The rain had mostly let up, but the sky was still lowering as Jewel held the car door for Edwina and preceded her down the narrow trail that led from the Mammoth Cave Ferry turnoff to the edge of Echo River Spring. Looking around the spring's banks, he saw a displaced blind-fish and large quantities of churned-up mud, but no body. He turned to face Edwina, trying to keep the suspicion off his face as she puffed her way down to join him.

"I don't see no body, Edwina," he said mildly. She made a show of squinting up and down the tributary stream that drained the spring into the main flow of the river, but finally she just stamped her foot in the mud and said, "I swear on the Book, Jewel, it was here. You can believe me or not." Without another word, she spun on her heel, slipping a bit in the mud, and lumbered back up the trail.

Jewel took a careful look around before following her. If she was telling the truth, the body might have slid into the spring. Then again, he couldn't see any kind of marks, and he strongly doubted that it had

rained hard enough to obliterate every skid and footprint, especially under heavy tree cover. So why was the mud so frothed up? Indians covering their tracks came to mind, the way you read in a Zane Grey novel, but the only place to go was into the river.

"Damn," he said. "Wish I knew if embalmed bodies sink." He didn't want to have to drag the river, not for a man who'd been dead four years, and if the body had been sucked into the cave by a backflow from the river, things could get really complicated. Was the river that high? Didn't look that way, but then he wasn't an expert. "Damn," he said again and started up the trail, wanting a smoke and wishing Knox was back from Detroit.

The Cadys—Edwina, Ray, and Ray Junior—lived in a clapboard shack down a dirt trail east of Floyd Collins' Crystal Cave. The land was owned by Dr. Thomas, the local dentist who also owned the cave and who had bought Floyd Collins' body from old Lee Collins after Floyd died trapped in a twisty tube in Sand Cave. Thomas exhibited the body under glass in the Grand Canyon, Crystal Cave's spectacular entrance room. Ray worked as a guide in the cave, giving tourists the rigmarole about Floyd's being "the world's greatest cave explorer" while they gawked at the waxed body in the black suit. Crystal Cave's discoverer had become its greatest tourist draw.

Jewel frequently had to fight down the urge to point out to the tourists that the world's greatest cave explorer had died because he got his foot wedged under a rock that weighed less than thirty pounds in a tunnel eighteen inches wide, and that the reason the body wore gloves was that he'd torn the flesh from his fingers trying to get himself free, and that the reason his head rested so deeply in the satin pillow was that by the time rescuers could get him out he'd been dead two days and cave crickets had eaten off his ears. But usually Jewel was in a better mood than that.

Today, however, any tourist might have gotten an earful because Jewel was out in the rain following a bloodhound's receding behind through the dripping woods north of the Cadys' home. He was cold, wet, hungry, and possibly out of his jurisdiction, as the line between Edmonson and Hart counties was just east of Crystal Cave and took a sharp turn near the riverbank. Not to mention the fact that he was searching *upstream* from the spot where the body might have fallen into the river; everybody seemed to have convinced themselves that Floyd Collins could hop on his one embalmed leg. Jewel decided that if the body was found in Hart County he was going immediately back to Brownsville no matter what anybody said. The only reason he'd come along was that Lon Bricker, Hart County sheriff, had begged him to act as a buffer between Edwina and everyone else.

"Lon, are you serious?" Jewel had said. "Have you ever heard her

“speak to me?” He’d had to raise his voice over the baying truckload of hounds, and he hoped Edwina hadn’t picked up on the conversation.

“Y’all have some history, Jewel. She’ll listen to you. You think her tongue’s sharp with you, you should hear her talk to my deputies.” Lon spit out his chaw and picked lint off his plug before biting off a fresh chunk. He shook his head, and drops of water bounced from the ends of his handlebar mustache. “Or Ray,” he added. “Jesus. I got a call and went out there in January, took Zeke Allison ‘cause I hate goin’ to houses myself. Never know what someone’ll do.” Lon spit and scuffed the brown splotch into the mud as the dog handler went around to the back of the truck.

“So we get there, the kid’s nowhere in sight, and we can hear Edwina screaming a hundred yards off. Zeke knocks and calls in ‘cause he and Ray drink together and I don’t know either of the Cadys to talk to. She stops hollering and opens the door about three inches. I didn’t call no one,’ she says.

“‘Well, someone called us,’ says Zeke.

“‘Well, I didn’t,’ she says, ‘but since you come all the way out here, I’ll explain. My no-good, shine-soaked bastard of a husband burnt up my daddy’s leg for firewood last night because he was too lazy to go twenty feet to the woodpile. I think you will agree that was uncalled-for.’

“‘I certainly do, Edwina,’ says Zeke, ‘but we don’t want no one to get hurt.’ Then we hear something break inside, and Ray says, ‘Damn, bitch, open the door. Who is it?’

“‘Edwina’s eyes just get winter-cold when she hears that. I think this is something to be discussed between man and wife,’ she says. Then she shuts the door in our faces.”

“Good Lord,” Jewel said. “He really burnt up the old man’s leg?” It was the only memento they had of him, Jewel knew; he’d been sunk by a storm in 1906 off Massachusetts, and his leg had washed up in Gloucester two weeks later. Frances Ware, Edwina’s mother, had come to Hart County that year to stay with cousins, and Jewel had heard the whole story on the banks of the river when he and Edwina were teenagers, him hoping she’d shut up long enough to get kissed and her talking to see how long he’d wait. He had no trouble envisioning her reaction to losing the leg so soon after Grandma Ware’s passing last Thanksgiving.

“Yup,” said Lon, “he did. Now we all know Ray Cady is a drunken lazy bastard, but this time I was worried he might really get hurt.”

“So what’d you do?”

Lon spit and wiped his mouth. “We left. Better him than us.”

So here Jewel was, being dragged by this maddened hound down the rippling hillside that defined the northern edge of Flint Ridge. The dog’s baying went up an octave, and Jewel slipped on the incline, skidding several yards on his right side as he fought desperately to keep from being pulled around headfirst. Well, Lon had told him not to hold onto the

hound when it got the scent. But he didn't know either if embalmed bodies sank or not, Jewel thought as he scraped across a mossy rock, so what would he know about dogs?

Then the dog stopped, just as Jewel was tumbling to a halt at the bottom of the hill and realizing what ridiculous thoughts he'd been having. He wondered if he'd hit his head and not noticed but was distracted from finding out by the dog's digging at the underbrush. Jewel got his bearings; he was less than a thousand yards from the entrance of Crystal Cave, at the base of the bluffs that stood along this part of the Green River's southern bank.

Had the hound found the leg? Jewel scooted forward, clots of mud and rotted leaves dropping from his pants, and peered into the brush.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said. He dropped flat on his stomach and wriggled under the bushes, pushing the dog away as he got hold of an oblong shape wrapped in a gunny sack. He yanked, the sack tore, and Jewel could see a stiff hand in a soggy, stained glove.

He wriggled backwards out of the brush and fired two shots from his revolver. Immediately every dog within a mile began howling with renewed and maniacal vigor, the one at his side included. "Shut up, you crazy hound," he said. "I'm half tempted to shoot *you*." He holstered the revolver, lit a Lucky, and sat down to wait for Lon.

Ray Cady Junior was a curious amalgam of his parents, somehow seeming to have acquired only the best qualities of two people who annoyed Jewel profoundly. He had his mother's lively intelligence and quick wit combined with the easygoing charm that had been Ray Senior's best feature before too much sour mash had pickled it out of him. Jewel wondered if liquor would do to the boy what it had done to the man; in the cave country, fruit never seemed to fall far from the tree.

For just a fraction of a second he caught himself wondering how things might have turned out if he had been the man to father a child on Edwina. But the boy who sat before him, staring between his knees and looking as if he needed a drink, brought his attention back to the here and now.

Jewel wouldn't have minded a nip himself, notwithstanding that Edmonson County was dry and that he himself was charged with enforcing that dryness. The trick to being a good lawman, Jewel felt, was knowing which laws needed enforcing and which were just intended as guidelines. It was kind of the difference between the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule; some laws were laws, some were more in the line of fatherly advice.

"Thou shalt not lie to an officer of the law," Jewel said. "Ain't that one of the Ten Commandments?"

Ray Junior didn't look up. "No, sir, I don't believe it is."

"Well, son, it is one of the commandments of the Penal Code of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and you have been lyin' to me like I was your second-best girl. Now, you and I both know that Floyd Collins didn't walk three miles up the Green River on one leg in a gunny sack. Correct?"

Ray nodded. "Yes, sir."

"So," Jewel went on, "someone must have put him there. But your mama and daddy both swear that they found him by Echo River Spring, and they say that you were there, too."

"Yes, sir."

"And they say that the one leg he had left was hanging in the water."

"Yes, sir."

"And they say that the thieves also pulled Floyd's gold tooth out of his head."

"Yes, sir."

Bingo. Jewel stood up behind Knox's desk. "Ray Junior," he said, "I can always tell when somebody's lying to me, and usually it's because they start saying 'sir' all the time. Now, I'm going to take you home and speak to your mother one more time, and while I'm speaking to her, I want you to think about that Penal Code I mentioned. Particularly the parts about grave robbing, body snatching, hindering an investigation, and taking the fall for something you didn't do."

Ray Junior kept his head down. One hand briefly fiddled with something in his shirt pocket before jerking back into his lap.

"What you got there?" Jewel asked.

"Nothing, Sir."

"Come on, kid, I ain't trying to make trouble for you. You want to know what I think happened? I think someone offered your old man more than he could turn down to steal the body for the attention it would draw. And if you want to know who I think it was, I'll tell you: I'll bet it was that damned dentist Thomas. Am I getting warm?"

Ray Junior said nothing, but Jewel could see that some of the tension had gone from his face. "If you ain't careful, kid, you'll crack a smile," Jewel said. "Come on, lemme see."

The boy tugged a harmonica out of his pocket and handed it to Jewel. The deputy turned it over in his hands, noticing the streaks of corrosion that marred the shiny surface in a rough handprint. "Looks like someone with a handful of battery acid got hold of it. Is it yours?"

"Yes," Ray Junior said. "Can I have it back?"

Jewel handed the harp back and opened Knox's office door. Gesturing theatrically, he clicked his heels together. "After you."

Half an hour later Jewel parked in front of the Cady place and told Ray Junior not to get out of earshot. As he got out of the car, the elder Ray came limping out of the house.

"Sweet Jesus, Ray," Jewel said. "What happened to your leg?"

Ray Senior watched his son disappear inside his house before he answered. "Jewel, you'd be doing me a kindness if you didn't curse so much around here," he said, keeping his voice low. "Edwina's so deep in the Good Book nowadays, she don't tolerate much." He shifted his grip on the crude crutch and scratched at the bandage swathing his bony thigh under the cut-off leg of his overalls.

Jewel couldn't help himself. "Is that what happened to your leg, her not tolerating?"

Ray surprised him by neither glaring nor spitting on his shoes. Instead he just shook his head like he was too tired to respond—like Edwina had, earlier in Knox's office. "No, it ain't. I just had me an accident."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Ray." Jewel decided to let it go. "Is the lady of the house available?"

The last rays of sunlight were trickling in through the thin curtain that covered Ray Junior's window as he slumped on his cot and rubbed a hand across his bristly scalp. Deputy Breedlove was sure to get them in trouble, Ray thought, because even if he did find out what really happened he wouldn't believe it.

He was glad he finally had his own room, even if it was just an attached shed that Ma had moved his cot into. It was his, and he and Pa had patched up an old stove that Dr. Thomas had thrown out so Ray Junior could stay out here even through the winter—"Long as you cut your own wood," Pa had said. That was fine with Ray. He reckoned he was old enough to have his own room even though the walls of the house were so thin a body couldn't sneeze without someone on the other side saying bless you.

But that had its good side, too, for instance now when he could listen to the conversation between Ma and Deputy Breedlove. They had sparked when they were not much older than him, Ray Junior knew from gossip among the cave guides, and he waited breathlessly for something improper to happen, some chink to appear in his mother's fearsome Gospel armor.

"Jewel, how many times have we gone around about this? Put that thing out," she said. They were out on the front stoop. Ray Junior reckoned his father was somewhere within eavesdropping distance, too.

"Edwina, I'm investigating you for a felony. You can damn well stand upwind."

"Investigating? Harassing, more like, and when we done most of the work for you. We reported the crime, we found the body—"

"You stand to benefit from the crime. Did you think I wouldn't notice that? The Louisville papers are full of it, 'Famous dead caver's body snatched in dark of night' or some such. And you think people won't come see Floyd Collins' Crystal Cave now that there's been a grave-robbing?"

I ain't got any dumber since I asked you to marry me, Edwina, just older."

Ray Junior had to concentrate to keep from whooping. She'd been engaged! Ma had been engaged to Deputy Breedlove before Pa!

"And I ain't got any dumber since I said no." Ray Junior sagged back onto his cot. The situation was not so scandalous as he had hoped. Still . . . he perked up again as Jewel went on.

"Well then, a few things must seem strange to you. Take the itinerary you fed me this morning. Down to Crystal at five A.M., back here, back down to Crystal, searching all the way to Echo River Spring and back, then getting into Brownsville in time to interrupt my coffee at nine thirty. The Army Corps of Engineers don't move that fast, Edwina, and that's ignoring the fact that I wouldn't believe Ray Cady getting up sober at five A.M. if I saw it myself."

Ray Junior was a little hurt. Deputy Breedlove didn't have to talk Daddy down that way.

"And then you tell me Ray Junior was with you. Bald-Faced Lie Number Two. Three, if you count early-rising Ray Senior, but I'm willing to let that slide because I wasn't there." Ray Junior felt sick at his stomach. What had he done to give them away? He fiddled with his harmonica, fitting his hand into the corroded handprint Grandpa Ware had left on it.

"If I understand you correctly, Jewel Breedlove, you are calling me a liar." Ma's voice was actually trembling, and Ray Junior trembled along with it; he couldn't remember ever hearing her this angry. "I said the boy was there, and he was there."

"Is that so? Well, I fed him a ringer when I was talking to him an hour ago. I told him that you'd said the thieves had pulled Floyd's gold tooth out, and he said yes they had. But you never said that, and Floyd's mouth was still sewed shut when we pulled him out of the sack." Ray Junior heard Deputy Breedlove's boot scrape on the porch as he crushed out his cigarette. "The only conclusion I can reasonably come to is that Ray Junior was instructed to agree with whatever account you gave. Now isn't that true?"

There was a long pause. Ray Junior sat shivering, thinking of the many tortures he would undergo before his parents were carted off to jail and he was sent to the Home for Wayward Boys. Deputy Breedlove was mean as a snake to trick him like that, and acting nice all the time too.

"You want the truth, Jewel?" Ma's voice had calmed. She even sounded a bit smug.

"I would appreciate it."

"All right. Monday night Ray Junior was down by the river—"

Ray Junior didn't stay to hear any more. He was out the door like a shot, sprinting down the narrow trail that snaked west along the river towards Echo River Spring.

Jewel cut the county auto's ignition and let it rattle to a halt in the turnoff at the Mammoth Cave Ferry landing. It was only a couple of hundred yards or so to the spring.

If I find Ray Cady Junior sitting by the spring talking to the walking ghost of his grandfather, Jewel thought, I am going to turn in my badge and become a preacher. And if I find him feeling sorry for himself on account of having two certifiable gooney-birds for parents, which is much more likely, then I will realize what a fool I have been for ever listening to anything Edwina Cady said. He was not looking forward to either event.

Jewel shut the door of the county car softly even though he doubted that the sound would carry far through the trees. He hesitated for a moment, then reached back through the open window and found his revolver. Its holster had split in the morning's rain, so he tucked it into his belt at the small of his back, wriggling in his pants until it rested comfortably and wouldn't slide down one of his pants legs. The big old Colt was an annoyance, but after seeing the hunks gouged out of Ray Senior's hip and thigh, Jewel wanted to be prepared.

The trail was broad and easily negotiable despite the dark. Stars gathered in rich clusters above the canopy of trees, winking as he crept around the spring itself and left the trail at the turn that led back up to the Mammoth Cave Hotel. The spring was close, and Jewel moved carefully in case the boy—or, for all he knew, the haunt—had unusually acute hearing. He had barely taken ten steps when he heard Ray Junior's voice and caught a sharp stinging odor of salt and mud and weeds and something dead.

"I appreciate your not taking Daddy's leg," the boy said.

A different voice replied, a thin bubbling wheeze that gave Jewel a shivery chill from his stomach right down into his legs. Lord Jesus, he thought. I don't want to be a preacher. Don't make me see this.

"I should have, the useless bastard," the voice said, and Jewel's chill deepened as he recognized the New England accent he'd noted in Grandma Ware. "This damned lump is stiffer than the wooden one ever was."

There was a long silence, awkward even from where Jewel stood. "You ruint my harp, Grandpa," Ray Junior finally said.

"Let's have it, lad." A quick glittering scale flashed from the rusty harmonica, and then a long, patient wail drifted across the river, a melancholy line that Jewel hadn't heard since the time before the war when he'd courted a sharp-tongued brunette named Edwina Ware. It was the melody she'd hummed while she stroked his hair and watched the river go by, the old sea chantey she'd learned from her mother.

"You learn that song now, son," said Old Man Ware. "That harp works fine." Water slapped softly downstream, and a few seconds later there was a quiet wash against the bank at Jewel's feet. He held his breath until the wash receded, then let it slowly out and began making his way

back to the trail. Behind him he heard Ray Junior painstakingly working out the notes on the harp, false starts and bright sad lines following Jewel all the way back to the county auto at the ferry road turnoff.

He sat in the car, thinking too hard even to move the Colt from where it dug into his kidneys. The leg was gone, that was damn certain. Floyd's body was back, and Dr. Thomas would find a way to turn a profit from the whole thing. Ray Senior and Edwina would go on being persnickety at each other, and the boy would work on the harmonica and have something to think about other than his gooney-bird parents.

"I can't see the harm in any of it," Jewel said out loud. Knox would be back in the morning, and he could go deal with Edwina if he wanted to; Jewel planned on spending a few days with his feet up on a desk. Guess I don't have to be a preacher after all, he thought as he started the car and headed back to Brownsville. And maybe I ain't that much of a fool either.

It was like he always said: the trick to being a good lawman was knowing which things to pursue and which to let be.

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CITIZEN DOWN

John H. Dirckx



The gathering dusk of an autumn day lay as thick as fog in an alley that formed a transition zone between a declining residential neighborhood and a declining business district—the kind of area where property values dwindle as inexorably as the crime rate rises. Three boys in their middle teens convened there shortly after the evening sports news ended. In the half-light their own mothers could hardly have told them apart. Each flaunted the same shapeless, flapping clothes and ragged haircut, and each rode a small-wheeled bicycle with the same frantic abandon, vaulting ruts and doing wheelies in the gravel.

They drifted along like leaves thrown casually together by the wind, exchanging only monosyllables but moving with common purpose in the same direction. At the end of the alley they turned up a side street and followed it to a business block where lighted signs glowed at a dry cleaner's and a real estate agency, both closed for the night, and a neighborhood bar, where things were just getting lively. They parked their bikes at a rack in front of a store whose display-window contained an antique velocipede. The sign on the window read:

DAR'S GOLDEN SPOKES BIKE SHOP
SALES AND SERVICE

The front part of the store was the salesroom, where dozens of bicycles stood in rows on the floor and on overhead racks. The walls were papered with posters in gar-

ish colors advertising bicycles, tires, gears, brakes, and accessories. With hardly a glance at the merchandise the three filed into the back of the store where the repair shop was located.

The proprietor of the shop, Dar Gannish, was adjusting the gears of a bicycle that rested upside-down in a jig on the workbench. A brilliant fluorescent light over the bench threw most of the rest of the shop into deep shadow. Overhead, steel rafters and a storage loft were barely discernible in the gloom.

Parts racks and cabinets lined the back wall and one side wall. At the other side, several tubular chrome chairs with dilapidated seats clustered around a soft drink machine and a gas space heater, and here the three visitors settled down after exchanging inarticulate greetings with Gannish.

A desultory conversation broke out among the boys. They spoke with exaggerated nonchalance, each covertly observing the demeanor and reactions of the other two.

"Jooguys see who the Raiders traded?"

"Yuh. Joo look at that algebra?"

"Nah. Joo?"

"No way. Joo lif' las' night?"

"Pressed two-oh-eight. My lef' lat kills."

The man at the workbench was gauntly built and sandy-complexioned, and he had a habit of gnawing his lip as he worked. Without actually participating in the conversation, he interjected occasional footnotes to the boys' remarks, most of them sententious and epigrammatic in style. "He who does not ex-

pect to win has already lost." "Bad taste is its own punishment." And then, "Get out of that orange pop, Yogi. If you have just one more, it'll give you the blind staggers."

"Yah, you'll get like Dingo," said one of the boys and at once fell abashedly silent. For a long minute nobody said anything, nobody looked at anybody.

Dar Gannish stepped back from his work. "Hey, Dorfin," he said. "Get up off your baseball cards and come over here and true up this front wheel. I gotta go upstairs. Easy on the chalk."

Neither too eagerly nor too sluggishly, Charles "Dwarf" Dorfin left the others and took over the job at the workbench. Meanwhile Gannish, having meticulously wiped the oil from his hands on a cotton rag, grasped a length of one inch hemp rope that hung down from the loft and began to climb it hand over hand. Although they'd all witnessed the performance many times before, the boys watched in unconcealed awe as the lithe, muscular figure moved up the rope with the inborn agility of an orangutan. Gannish disappeared from view in the shadows overhead, and they could hear him moving around on the rough platform of wooden planks.

Dorfin got busy with the chalk and the spoke wrench, acutely conscious that Gannish was rummaging among the bicycle frames stored directly above him. Eventually the boys resumed their conversation, breaking off again when Gannish lowered a bike frame on a chain and then came swarming down the rope to the floor.

At eight o'clock Gannish sent the boys home, locked the street door, and turned off the lights in the showroom. Then he went back to the workbench and settled down for a long session, building a custom racer.

He had been hard at it for more than an hour when a key rattled in the lock of the alley door and a lean, sawn man let himself into the shop. Gannish stared at him in surprise without ceasing to run a fine file rhythmically back and forth over a welded joint. "Forget your lunchbox?" he asked.

The newcomer cast sidelong glances into the shadows as if he expected to find somebody lurking there. "I want to talk to you."

"Yeah? What's up, Skelph?" Gannish's manner was impatient and barely civil.

"Sales. Sales are up. I've been trying out some new marketing strategies, and they're paying off," said Skelph, the commercial jargon sounding like a foreign language in his mouth.

"So now you want to go on commission, right?" asked Gannish without looking up from his work. "Just because you sold a couple of Canellis last week."

Skelph sniffed vigorously. "I could sell a lot more with a little incentive. Every other salesman in town is on commission."

"Sure. Cars, jewelry, clothes—stuff with big markups. That's what the commissions come out of, you know. If I marked bikes up that far, nobody'd buy them. The folks could do better at the discount department stores out at the malls. If I

put you on commission, I couldn't pay my overhead."

"You could if—" Skelph stopped suddenly and swallowed. "Speaking of overhead . . ." He fell silent again and waited until Gannish looked up expectantly. Then he repeated "overhead" with a meaningful toss of his head in the direction of the shadowy loft above them.

"What about overhead?" For the first time since his arrival, Skelph had Gannish's undivided attention. Now he didn't seem too sure what to do with it.

"Well," he stammered, "I just thought—if we could have some kind of partnership going—"

Gannish put down his file, slid his stool back, and stood up. People who knew him much better than Skelph said he had icewater in his veins, but when he narrowed his eyes like that and let his jaw sag, they kept their distance. "You been up above, Skelph?" he asked very quietly.

"Well, not up the rope—"

"So what did you do, fly?"

Skelph sniffed and shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "Some of the kids said—"

"You listen to me, Skelph. Don't pay any attention to those kids. They'd rather tell lies than chew gum. And I don't need any partners. And I don't pay any commissions. And right now I've got work to do, and I don't need anybody around here bothering me."

Skelph saw that he had made a serious tactical error and prepared to retreat in good order.

"Another thing," said Gannish as Skelph reached the alley door. He

pointed aloft with his file. "Like I told you when you started working here, that is a very dangerous place up there. As in fatal."

After Skelph had gone, Gannish stepped to the alley door to make sure it was locked. Then he put a flashlight in his back pocket and climbed the rope to the loft. He was still there fifteen minutes later when somebody rapped sharply and urgently on the alley door.

Gannish dropped down the rope and called out, "Who's there?" from just inside the door.

"Pickrel," came the reply from the alley.

Gannish unfastened the door and admitted a tall man with the build of a professional hockey player and the manner of a professional hoodlum. "You hear the weather forecast?" asked Pickrel.

"Sure."

"You still going?"

"Sure."

"That's all I wanted to know." Pickrel had barely stepped inside the shop, and now he turned to go. "You better get some sleep."

"Hold on a minute, Dale. Have you ever talked to Skelph about—anything?"

"Skelph. Actually, I hardly know the dude. Talked about what?"

Gannish looked past Pickrel into the dark, deserted alley. "I don't know. Business. Selling stuff."

Pickrel's face went as blank as a slammed door. "Get some sleep," was all he said.

At one A.M. Gannish's wife Jillanne dialed the number of the store from home and got a busy signal. No one was on the line, however,

and Gannish was certainly not busy.

At lunchtime on the following day Detective Sergeant Cyrus Auburn found himself sharing a table in the canteen at headquarters with two clerks from Records who were discussing the relative merits of various kinds of chili. Chili connoisseurs always gave Auburn a pain, chiefly because chili always gave him a pain. He stood their jabber about red beans and cayenne and Tabasco sauce as long as he could; then he retreated to his office a full five minutes before his lunch hour ended, thus saving his superior officer, Lieutenant Savage, the trouble of having him paged.

"We have a citizen down," said Savage, "at a bicycle shop on North Franklin. Possible homicide. A patrol car went through the alley right before the shifts changed this morning. The back door was wide open. They went in and found the owner of the shop dead on the floor." He consulted a strip of adding machine paper, which was what he used to make notes at the phone. "Darwin Floyd Gannish, age thirty-six."

Auburn found a packet of antacid mints in his desk drawer and put two of them in his mouth.

"You must have had the chili."

"Why does that name sound familiar to me?"

"He's the stilt-walker. Was. Used to dress up as Uncle Sam and walk on stilts in the Fourth of July parade. Six or seven years ago he tried to duck under a wire and fell. Broke both arms and his jaw."

Auburn was chewing the mints and nodded at the recollection. "So what happened to him last night?"

"Well—he fell again. Maybe. From a storage area above his workshop. Landed on the workbench and rolled off on the floor. Maybe. Then a piece of the flooring from above came down on him and finished the job. Maybe."

"Do we know anything for sure?"

"We know he's dead. So far that's about the only thing Kestrel and Stamaty can agree on. They're over there right now calling each other's parents nasty names."

"What's the flap?"

"The patrolmen who found Gannish thought it was obviously an accident, especially after they talked to his wife. So they turned it over to the coroner and left. Stamaty went in, poked around, thought maybe suicide. Then he found some money was missing—"

"And he thought maybe homicide."

"Reenter your Department of Public Safety. Kestrel walks in and throws a fit because they'd already moved the body and touched things without wearing rubber gloves. Like I said, they're both over there now pouting like a couple of prima donnas."

Auburn could easily imagine the scene. Stamaty, the coroner's investigator, had a distinguished record as a beat cop in another city and carried lead in his thigh. He could be as courteous to the next-of-kin as an uptown undertaker, but when he made up his mind about something, he was as hard to budge as a fire hydrant.

Kestrel, the police evidence technician, was an entirely different breed of cat. For him the collection and objective assessment of evidence weren't just a job—they were a way of life and a religion. Kestrel was a sworn peace officer who had never made an arrest and whose greatest fear during a crime scene investigation was that the criminal was still lurking on the premises.

"Why don't you just tell Kestrel to do his job the best he can and get out?"

"Because Kestrel doesn't report to me. You do."

"Question. Am I going over there to investigate a homicide or just play referee?"

"You're going over there to analyze the situation and respond accordingly, just like a good old generic police detective."

"In a plain brown wrapper."

"Get out of here while I'm still politically correct."

A harsh wind blew random drops of rain across the windshield as Auburn drove to the Golden Spokes bike shop. A police cruiser was parked at the curb and, behind it, the evidence technician's van. Auburn turned into the alley behind the shop and squeezed into a narrow space between the coroner's van and a hatchback coupe with the logo of the bike shop on its door panels.

While he was waiting for someone to let him in the back door, a man in a black rubber apron came out of the bar next door, dumped a tub of ice cubes on the ground, and went back inside without a glance at Auburn.

Patrolman Fritz Dollinger unlocked the door. The part of the shop entered from the alley was the service and repair department. The first thing Auburn noticed was the smell, which somehow seemed as right here as the smell of popcorn in a movie theater. It was a rich, complicated smell, compounded of the scents of lubricants, solvents, and cements, and underlying it all the pungent aroma of rubber tires and tubes.

The body of a man lay on the floor next to a workbench amid scattered tools and parts, including the tubular steel frame of a bicycle without wheels. A rough two by ten plank probably sixteen feet long lay across one end of the bench where it had evidently fallen, tearing down a fluorescent shop light and causing considerable havoc in general.

Almost involuntarily Auburn looked upward. A storage loft had been rigged with rows of similar planks laid across the steel roof trusses fully twenty feet from the floor. How you got up there wasn't immediately apparent.

The lights were off in the front part of the store, where new and secondhand bicycles were displayed on racks. Cabinets and bins of parts stood cheek by jowl around two sides of the workshop. On a third side three or four battered chairs were ranged around a pop machine and a rack of sports magazines that looked at least one or two Olympiads out of date.

Stamaty was sitting in one of the chairs with his camera case on the floor at his feet, working up a report on a clipboard. Kestrel hovered

over the body on the floor, doing something with a tape measure. Neither of them spoke to Auburn.

"Were you the one who found him?" he asked Dollinger, who needed a shave.

"Me and Krasnoy. About six forty this morning."

"What are you doing on nights?"

"Just lucky, I guess."

Auburn nodded toward a lanky figure silhouetted against the front window of the shop.

"Who's that?"

"Guy named Skelph. He came in to open up the shop at nine o'clock."

"And was invited to walk right in," muttered Kestrel without looking up from his work.

"The police had been and gone by then," Stamaty told Auburn. "They called this an accident. If I hadn't let Skelph in and let him look around, we still wouldn't know there's cash missing."

"The scene should have been cordoned off until it had been gone over for trace evidence," objected Kestrel. "By the time I got here, the body had been moved, things had been handled—"

"I shot nine pictures of the body before I—"

Auburn had once attended a play off Broadway in which a feuding couple refused to talk to each other but managed to communicate by addressing their remarks to a blue china dog on the chimneypiece. Just now he wasn't in the mood to play a china dog. He took Dollinger out into the alley, where they sat in Auburn's car to get out of the blustery wind.

Auburn twisted in his seat to ex-

amine the topography of the alley. A high, unbroken wooden fence covered with graffiti ran along the side opposite the back of the bike shop.

"Why'd you and Krasnoy come through here this morning?"

"No special reason. Things were quiet. Just cruisin'."

"Did you know this guy Gannish?"

"Oh yes, we knew Dar Gannish. According to the neighborhood grapevine, he's been fencing stolen bikes for years. But nobody ever caught him with the goods."

"Did he run the business himself?"

"Yes. And he did run it. He'd be in here until ten or twelve every night. I guess he did a lot of custom jobs for rich kids and guys who were into racing and mountain biking."

"Workaholic?"

"Could be. I guess you haven't been over at his house yet?" Dollinger's heavy features, masked by fatigue and a day's growth of beard, seemed to convey more of a message than his words.

"Not yet. So what happened this morning?"

"We came through here, heading south, just before it started to get light. That door was wide open. We didn't think too much about it at first because Gannish's car was here. But we drove back through again for another look. Krasnoy got out and went in the door and didn't come out again.

"I got spooked and radioed in before I went after him. He was searching the place with a flashlight in one hand and his .38 in the other, and he was more spooked

than I was because every step he took, about a hundred and fifty bike shadows jumped around on the walls."

"Was the front door locked?"

"And deadbolted."

"And Gannish was on the floor—where he is now?"

"Right, only he was facedown and that plank was partly over him. We figured he was up in the attic and the plank he was standing on gave way. I still think that's what happened."

"Where's the stairway that leads up there?"

"There isn't one. There's no way up except a rope you climb, hand over hand. And you never saw anything until you saw Gannish go up and down that rope. He could have made a living in the circus."

"Is the rope still there?"

"Sure. But don't ask me if I went up it. I've got tennis elbow from trying to fix my wife's transmission."

Auburn was on the point of making a crack about Dollinger's weight when he remembered that it was a sensitive issue. Instead he asked about the condition of the body when it was found.

"Cold and getting stiff. I called it in, and they told me to leave Krasnoy here and go to Gannish's house to inform the next of kin."

"His wife."

"His wife." Dollinger drew a long breath. "She said she called here after midnight and got a busy signal. I don't know if you noticed—"

"The two by ten knocked the phone off the hook."

"After that she fell asleep over a book."

"Any kids?"

"No."

Auburn looked up and down the alley. "Did you talk to the guy at that bar next door yet?"

"I didn't talk to anybody except Mrs. Gannish, sergeant. I thought this death was an accident, and I still think so. I was through giving my report downtown and halfway out the door when the lieutenant sent me back over here to relieve the day guys who relieved Krasnoy. I was supposed to let Stamaty from the coroner's office in and then take off. I'm still here."

"What happened?"

"About the time Stamaty walks in the back door, here comes this guy through the front, puts on the lights, and he's open for business."

"Skelph. Do you know him?"

"No. Says he runs the store from nine to three, six days a week. Says the last time he saw Gannish alive was yesterday afternoon when he got off work."

"What about the missing money?"

"Skelph was nosing around while me and Stamaty were taking pictures, and he found a locked drawer broken open back in the corner of the workshop. Says Gannish used to put all the folding money out of the cash register in there when he closed up the store at night."

"Which was at what time?"

Dollinger yawned violently.

"Twenty hundred hours."

"You belong in bed. Go home."

Before returning to the bike shop, Auburn went to the back of the bar next door and hammered on the steel door until the man in the rub-

ber apron opened it. Auburn showed identification.

"How late were you here last night?"

"One thirty, quarter to two."

"Did you notice anything unusual out here when you locked up?"

"Out here? No." He was young, stout, flushed, with sweat on his upper lip. "After dark this door stays bolted. How'd they get in over there?"

"How'd who get in?"

"Whoever broke in the bike shop."

Damp, tepid air laden with stale tobacco smoke and the sour fumes of stale beer drifted out of the dark interior of the barroom behind him.

"What makes you think somebody broke in?"

"Well, I didn't figure all you cops were over there fixing the plumbing." Either he hadn't read the sign on the coroner's van or he was playing dumb.

"But you didn't see or hear anything last night?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see Gannish yesterday or last night?"

"No, sir."

"Does he ever come in the bar?"

"Only to get change once in a while."

When Auburn went back into the bike shop he found everybody in the same place as when he'd left. The only sounds were the purr of the gas flame in the space heater next to the pop machine and the faint clatter of Kestrel poking among the tools and scattered parts and spilled oil on the workbench.

"Who's on first?" asked Auburn, and got no answer.

Skelph ambled back from the show window at the front of the store. "Are you the detective I'm supposed to talk to?" he asked. He had a long, narrow shape, none too symmetrical, reminding Auburn of a wax figurine that has been left out in the sun. His nails were bitten to the quick, he held his left arm stiffly, and he had a habit of sniffing as if he thought something were burning.

Auburn took out a three-by-five-inch file card and entered Skelph's name, address, and phone number on it. "How long have you been working for Gannish?" he asked.

"About four months." Skelph repeated what he'd told Dollinger and Stamaty about his working hours. No, he hadn't been back last night. Why would he have come back last night? Sniff.

"What do you think happened?"

"I don't know. Maybe he fell, maybe somebody fixed it to look like he fell."

"What somebody?"

"Whoever broke the cash drawer open."

"Show me."

Skelph led him to a back corner of the shop, giving the body a wide berth. The lock of the cash drawer had been forced with a large screwdriver, which had been left lying in the drawer. Kestrel was just finishing his examination of the drawer and the tool.

"How much did he keep there?" Auburn asked Skelph. "Round numbers."

"Three or four hundred."

"Who knew that besides you and him?"

Skelph stared into the empty drawer and sniffed. "I don't know. Probably his wife. Probably some of the kids that hang around here."

"You mean customers, neighborhood kids . . ."

"Bunch of punks from the neighborhood mostly. Dar used to get them to do odd jobs for him around here at night. Then he'd give them a couple of dollars. He was too cheap to pay me a fair wage."

"What kind of odd jobs?"

"I don't know, blowing up tires, checking parts bins. He'd send a kid across town to buy a part from another dealer so he wouldn't have to use the last one in the bin. Look at all this stuff. This place isn't a store, it's a museum. I think his ambition was to have one of every bicycle part ever made. Not to put it on a bike—just to have it."

"What's up above?"

"Overflow stock. More museum."

Auburn grasped the climbing rope and gave it a jerk. It was a length of one inch hemp with a single knot at the lower end to keep it from fraying. At the top it was looped through an iron bracket. "Can you get up there?"

"Never tried. Never saw anybody go up there but Dar."

"How did he carry stuff up and down? You can't climb a rope with one hand."

"There's a pulley up there with a chain over it, and he'd run stuff up and down in a basket."

Auburn walked around the store, past Kestrel playing with the phone, past Stamaty still working on his report, and past the rows of bikes in the front. He came back to Skelph.

"Did Gannish have trouble with anyone lately? Any feuds, threats?"

"Not as I know of."

"Was he the only owner of the business?"

"Yes."

"Did his wife ever come to the store?"

"She drove him to work a couple of times when his car was getting fixed."

"But she isn't involved in the business?"

"Not as I could ever see."

"How well do you know her?"

Skelph shrugged and waved one spadelike hand in a vague gesture. "Not at all." Auburn suspected he would have liked to add, "and don't want to." After one or two more questions he sent Skelph home.

"You guys about finished here?" he asked Stamaty and Kestrel.

"I've been finished," said Stamaty. He took off his gold-rimmed bifocals and stowed them carefully in a case. "I'm just hanging around waiting to see Kestrel shinny up that rope."

Kestrel, notoriously incapable of taking a joke, made no reply.

"Somebody's going to have to go up there," said Auburn. "There's got to be some indication there as to whether this was an accident or not."

Stamaty picked up his camera and field kit. "If it was an accident," he said, "what happened to the money?"

"Somebody could have been here with him when he fell—somebody who knew the cash was there."

"Or," suggested Kestrel, who was also packing up his gear, "some-

body could have come along the alley after he fell, found the door open —”

“Ah, yes,” said Stamaty with heavy irony, “the venerable Passing Tramp Theory. Whoever got that money knew exactly where to look for it. None of the other locked drawers were broken open.”

“Do we know where the key to that drawer is?” asked Auburn.

“It was on a ring in Gannish’s pocket. Kestrel’s got his keys so he can check out the inside of his car out back.”

“Good thing *that’s* locked,” said Kestrel, his chin cleaving the air like a broadsword. “It’s the only part of the scene that hasn’t been pawed over.”

Auburn, foreseeing a resumption of hostilities, left to interview Mrs. Gannish.

The wind had died down, but the air was heavy with the threat of rain as he drove ten blocks to a double house of which the Gannishes occupied one side. Auburn thought the woman who answered his ring might be Mrs. Gannish’s mother. He showed identification and stated his business.

The living room was furnished cheaply but tastefully, and it had a bookcase full of serious novels and reference works where one might have expected to find a television set. Mrs. Gannish appeared at once, a small, dark woman who seemed somehow to go with the books. What didn’t fit so well was her scent, which was the kind Auburn’s father used to call “dime store perfume.”

The older woman let herself out, promising to be “right there” if Mrs. Gannish needed her, from which Auburn inferred that she lived in the other side of the double.

Mrs. Gannish went to a chair in the darkest corner of the room, and Auburn seated himself opposite her and got out a blank file card and a pen. “I’m sorry to have to intrude on you at a time like this,” he began.

“Are you really?” she asked, with a veiled smile that was second cousin to a grimace. “I guess maybe you are.” She looked at her hands. “Don’t pay any attention to me. It’s just that I spend my life saying I’m sorry when I’m not.”

Auburn waited in vain for some elaboration of this cryptic utterance. He was about to start the routine questioning when she went on. “I always knew Dar would kill himself sooner or later.” Her voice was a high-pitched croon, something like the mewing of a sea bird.

“What makes you think he killed himself?” He tried to catch her eye, but she was still examining her hands.

“I don’t mean suicide,” she said. “Just taking unnecessary risks all the time. Daredevil stunts, trick motorcycle riding, stilt walking. And that idiotic rope. He could sponsor a water polo team at the high school, but he claimed he couldn’t afford to put in a simple flight of wooden stairs up to the loft.”

“We’re looking into the question of just how he came to fall,” said Auburn. “Maybe you’re not aware that one of the floorboards from up above came down—”

“The policeman who was here

this morning said something about that. It must have slipped out from under him. They're just lying up there loose on the rafters."

"Have you ever been up there?"

For the first time she looked at him. "Not this girl. The riskiest thing I ever did was to marry Dar Gannish when he was making a living painting bridges."

"I guess you don't feel there's any chance that your husband's death was anything but an accident?"

"Oh, no. What I meant about Dar killing himself—"

"I understand that. I was wondering if you thought it was possible that somebody else killed him."

"But who? How? Didn't he fall?"

"It looks like it. The board certainly fell. But that could have been arranged."

She was shaking her head briskly as she scrutinized her palms again. "I can't believe that. People like Dar just don't make enemies. Nobody could take him seriously enough to want to kill him."

"People kill for lots of different reasons. Would there have been any money or valuables in the shop, other than the stock?"

"There's money in the bottom drawer of the green steel cabinet if he remembered to take it out of the cash register last night when he closed the store."

Auburn nodded. "Mr. Skelph told us about that. The money seems to be missing. In fact, the drawer was forced open."

She sat forward quickly. "Are you sure about that?"

He was still nodding. "And the door to the alley was found open,

with the temperature outside around forty. So you can see there has to be more to this than a simple accident. Who besides your husband and Skelph had keys to the shop?"

"Nobody that I know of. I don't even have one."

"When was the last time you were at the shop?"

"Two or three weeks ago, probably. Why?"

"And when was the last time you saw your husband alive?"

"Yesterday morning about seven. I leave for work early, but Dar usually slept in. Skelph opens up the shop in the morning, and Dar wouldn't go in until after lunch."

"Did you talk to him yesterday on the phone at all?"

"He called me last night a little after seven. Said he was going to be working late on a custom job and not to expect him home for dinner."

"Anything unusual about that?"

"No, not at all. But when he still wasn't home by one o'clock this morning, I called him, or tried to. I got a busy signal. I was planning to call again in five or ten minutes, but I fell asleep. The next thing I knew, there was a policeman at the door telling me Dar was dead."

When Auburn ran out of questions, she asked a few. For answers to most of them he referred her to her lawyer or the coroner's office. He gave her one of his cards and left the house just as the buses were loading at the elementary school across the street.

The woman who lived in the other side of the double was on her half of the front porch taking in her

hanging plants for the winter. Her heavy features looked as if they'd forgotten how to smile. "Is she all right?" she asked Auburn.

"I think so. I guess you know these folks pretty well?"

"Just since they've lived here, about five years. They're my tenants—I own the house. What happened to him?"

"Are you familiar with the bike shop?"

"I know where it is. I've never gone inside."

"He fell from a storage loft."

"When? During the night?"

"Yes, apparently. Did you happen to see him yesterday?"

"I don't remember seeing him. I think I heard his car leave."

"What time was that?"

"Around noon."

The wind was getting raw and blowing her hair awry. Auburn held the screen door open while she carried in two pots and set them on the hearth of a fireplace that hadn't been used in a long time, if ever. Two dozen photographs in matching frames, most of them studio portraits of children, were arranged on the mantelpiece with scrupulous symmetry.

"Are all of these yours?" he asked.

"Children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, grandnieces, grandnephews." She had them disposed like cans of soup in a kitchen cupboard. Two pictures, one of a boy and one of a girl, had black borders.

Her name was Mrs. Sanzevar, and she was a widow. By the time Auburn fished a file card out of his pocket to jot a few notes, she had the interview well under way. She

predicted that Mrs. Gannish would soon get over her loss. All in all, Mrs. Sanzevar seemed to have little regard for her neighbor.

"She has eye trouble," she remarked with sarcastic disdain. "She can't see dirt. Or cobwebs." Auburn knew instinctively that the top of every door frame in Mrs. Sanzevar's half of the house could pass a white glove test any day of the week.

He had no difficulty whatever in getting the conversation around to the Gannishes' domestic relations. *She* was a nag. *He* stayed at the shop half the night to get away from her. In his absence she entertained male callers. A glance at their garbage can would give Auburn some notion of the amount of liquor she and her company consumed.

"How about Mr. Gannish? Did he drink a lot too?"

She was carefully picking dead leaves off the plants on the hearth, removing each with a decisive twist of her deeply dimpled wrist. "Not that I know of. I never saw him drunk, if that's what you mean."

"Did Mrs. Gannish have company last night?"

"She has company every night."

"Late?"

"I go to bed after the news, and I could hear them long after that. That laugh of hers would curdle milk."

"Does she ever go out in the evening by herself?"

"Sometimes, but she didn't go anywhere last night. The garages are under the back bedrooms, and when she starts her car, it sounds like a space shuttle is going to come

up through my floor." She stepped into the kitchen briefly to dispose of a handful of dead leaves.

"I hope you don't think I'm some kind of a crank," she said when she came back. "I try not to judge people, but it's hard when morals are so lax nowadays. I blame it on the parents not bothering to teach their children what's right and what's wrong. And this cable television. I wouldn't have it in my home. It's a schoolhouse of corruption."

Auburn sensed, from the way she rapped out the phrase, that it wasn't an impromptu coinage. He prepared to leave. She moved in front of the door to keep him from getting away before the sermon was over. "And what has it done to their ideas about good looks? The girls stop eating so they'll turn into sticks, and the boys lift weights until they swell up like draft horses." Her glance strayed to the picture gallery on the mantelpiece and lingered there.

On his way back to headquarters Auburn took North Franklin past the bike shop and was surprised to see Kestrel's van still out front. He parked in the alley again and found Kestrel going over Gannish's car with the relentless thoroughness for which he was famous.

"You just missed Stamaty," said Kestrel. "The ambulance crew were late getting the body."

They went into the shop together. "I wasn't looking for Stamaty," said Auburn. "I'm still wondering about evidence up above."

"I'd be up there now if it weren't for that rope," said Kestrel. "You're looking at a guy who failed high school gym four years in a row."

"What do you want—a cherry picker?"

"A decent ladder would—" His voice trailed off as his gaze shifted to the open alley door behind Auburn.

"Where's Dar?" The newcomer was built like a linebacker. His high brow had the color and sheen of burnished copper. Grizzled mustaches straggled across his jowls in two wild ogees to meet his sideburns.

"Are you a customer?" asked Auburn.

"No. Where is he?"

"Relative?"

The man took a toothpick out of his mouth. "Hey, why the third degree? Who are you guys?"

Auburn showed him identification. Kestrel moved off to a discreet distance, leaving Auburn to deal with the visitor.

His name was Dale Pickrel, and when he learned that Gannish was dead, he expressed his astonishment with a volcano of profanity. "Hey, he was standing right where you are at ten o'clock last night, and there wasn't anything wrong with him then. What happened to him?"

"Apparently he fell from the loft."

Pickrel looked at the litter of tools around the workbench. "He was working on that bike frame right there," he said. "Had it up here in this jig. Where'd this two by ten come from?"

"Looks like it came down with him on it." Auburn noted that Pickrel wore flashy diamond rings on both little fingers, had dark blood under the nail of a recently smashed left thumb, and was wearing shoes with minute flecks of yellow paint

over the toes. "You say you were here last night?"

"Between nine and ten. Stayed only a couple of minutes. Me and Dar had a date to go to Stillwell today. Now I see why he didn't show up."

"Did you do business with him?"

Pickrel fixed Auburn with a gaze of oxlike stolidity. "Business. Actually we did do a little business from time to time. I'm in retail sales. But this today was—I ain't sure I ought to tell you."

"That's up to you. Is it anything you think might be connected with his death?"

"Connected with his death? I thought you said he fell."

"That's how it looks, but there are a couple of loose ends. Was anybody else in on your plans today?"

"No, just me and Dar. We like to go out and climb radio towers this time of year, look at the leaves changing color. Which you're not supposed to do. Climb 'em, I mean."

"It's a long way down if you step on some air by mistake. Are you acquainted with Mrs. Gannish?"

"Mrs. Gannish. Actually I've hardly met the lady." Pickrel grasped the climbing rope and snapped it sharply. "Nothing wrong with that. I swear I don't see how that two by ten came down."

Before Auburn realized what he was doing, Pickrel had shot half-way up the rope. "Hold it, sir, would you, please? Our evidence technician hasn't been up there yet."

Pickrel lowered himself to the floor again with one smooth, effortless movement. "What kind of evidence are you looking for?" he asked.

"Whatever's there."

"You really think it might not have been an accident?"

"We're keeping an open mind about it."

"I'd sure hate to think somebody rigged up a booby trap for old Dar."

It wasn't easy to get rid of Pickrel. What finally did it was Auburn pulling out a file card and taking down his address and phone number. After escorting him out into the alley, he added the make, model, and license number of his pickup truck to the data on the card.

Kestrel had finished going over Gannish's car, and Auburn asked him if he'd found anything.

"That's hard to say. He seems to have thought of it as a kind of trash can on wheels."

Auburn consulted his watch. "I think I'll report in downtown and knock off for the day. Are you going to see about getting a ladder in here tomorrow?"

"You'll be downtown before I will."

Auburn had a last look around. Was this idea of a storage loft accessible only by climbing a rope just an eccentricity of Gannish's, or did it have some ulterior purpose? "Better leave some lights on in here when you lock up."

Just as Auburn was thinking of getting out of bed next morning, the dispatcher phoned him from headquarters with an invitation from Lieutenant Savage to attend morning report. By chewing his toast between strokes of his razor he made it with a couple of minutes to spare. Savage caught him in the hall.

"I wanted you to hear Dollinger's

report, but I didn't want to keep him over again. He's got jet lag as it is." Auburn nodded acquiescence in Savage's decision to sacrifice a detective sergeant's convenience for a patrolman's comfort and went into the conference room.

As it turned out Krasnoy, not Dollinger, gave the report. Krasnoy was still in his twenties. He probably spent more on hair spray than Auburn did on soap. He was so fascinatingly homely that people could hardly take their eyes off him, a fact of which he was well aware and that he often turned to his advantage.

"After we got the social drinkers bedded down for the night," he said, "we started circling through the alley between North Franklin and Terrace about every twenty minutes like Sergeant Auburn suggested. About four this morning we nailed him, sergeant, just going in."

"Did he have a key?" asked Auburn.

"Sure he did. About four foot long, with a claw on one end."

"What'd he have to say for himself?"

"Said if some something-something killed his buddy Dar, he was going to find the something-something-something and—"

"Was he drunk?"

"Sober as Pocahontas."

"Did he get upstairs? Up that rope?"

"There's no way," said Dollinger. "We actually saw him duck in from the alley. He still had the crowbar in his hand when we collared him."

After report, Auburn and Savage interviewed Pickrel in a holding cell.

Pickrel vigorously denied criminal intent and repeated his assertion that his purpose in entering the bike shop during the night was to forestall (he said "help") the police in their search for evidence that somebody had engineered Gannish's fatal fall.

In the elevator Savage told Auburn that the Bureau of Parks was going to erect a ladder at the bike shop that morning. "And I want you to go up there with Kestrel and see if you can figure out what that clown was looking for in the middle of the night."

On his desk Auburn found reports of background checks on Skelph, Mrs. Gannish, and Pickrel. Lorne Skelph's slate was clean, but his past was a bit shadowy. He'd had nine jobs and six known addresses in the past five years, but there were gaps in the record. Presently he was living in an apartment about three blocks from the bike shop. He had never been married, never had a driver's license, never finished high school.

Dale Pickrel was sole proprietor of a local chain of discount stores specializing in clothing, furniture, decorative items, and tools imported from Mexico, Haiti, and the Orient. He had twice been convicted of fencing hijacked merchandise but had escaped sentencing both times on technicalities. He was in hock up to his eyes, his credit rating was shocking, and he was being sued by two former employees in small claims court for unpaid wages.

Jillanne Gannish had an associate degree in accounting slash marketing and worked as a complaints

adjuster at Zwelfinger's department store (which incidentally had been one of Skelph's former employers). No doubt that explained her remark about saying she was sorry all the time and not meaning it.

She and Gannish had been married for nine years and had been renting from Mrs. Sanzevar for six. They had no children. Gannish had never been arrested, but for most of his eight years in the bicycle business there'd been neighborhood rumors that he trafficked in cheap imitations of expensive imports, in stolen bikes and parts, and in drugs.

According to the summary report on the forensic autopsy carried out the previous afternoon, Gannish had died from paralysis of the respiratory muscles due to a skull fracture with brain and brainstem laceration and hemorrhage. There were other injuries as well, some of them serious but none fatal. Death had occurred no later than midnight. A drug screen was negative.

At nine o'clock Savage called Auburn into his large and brightly lighted but otherwise Spartan office. Kestrel was there with two manila envelopes. Free exchange of information between the county coroner's office and the Department of Public Safety was standard policy at the administrative level, however much the employees of those departments might scrap over protocol and precedence. Kestrel had a set of the photographs Stamaty had shot at the bicycle shop yesterday as well as the prints of his own photographs, copies of which were no doubt in Stamaty's hands by now.

Stamaty's photos were glossy

eight by tens with a half-inch white border all around, while Kestrel's had a matte finish and no border. The date, the time, and a serial number were integral to each of Stamaty's prints. Although some of Kestrel's contained comparison rulers or cards with identifying data, most did not. For each one that did, there was an identical one without, the reason being that some courts would reject as inadmissible any photograph submitted in evidence that contained extraneous objects introduced by the photographer or investigator.

Kestrel was at the conference table laying out selected photos from both sets with the deliberation of a deeply committed solitaire player.

"Something interesting?" asked Auburn.

"Kestrel's got a theory," said Savage. "I'll let him tell it."

The evidence technician cleared his throat and squared his jaw. "If you compare Stamaty's pictures with mine," he said, "you'll see at least three differences."

If it had been Stamaty talking, he would have challenged Auburn to find the differences, but that wasn't Kestrel's way. "First, Stamaty's pictures all show the body lying facedown, but by the time I got there, it had been flipped into the supine position, as you see here."

Auburn compared the two images of the body shot at roughly the same angle and distance. Stamaty's showed only the back and side of Gannish's head, the skin livid, traces of blood on the hair. In Kestrel's photo the face appeared swollen and mottled, and the glazed

eyes seemed to stare into infinity through half-closed lids.

"Second, in Stamaty's pictures this plank is resting partly on the workbench and partly across the small of the subject's back. In mine it's been moved to the end of the workbench."

"Stamaty admitted he moved the body and the board," said Auburn, who felt Kestrel was carrying his pique against Stamaty to impossible lengths.

Kestrel took out an ultra-thin mechanical pencil and used it as a pointer, carefully avoiding touching the emulsion on the print. "This picture of Stamaty's shows a tool of some kind with a wooden handle, probably a file, on the floor next to the end of the plank. It wasn't there when I got there." He put away his pencil and leaned back in his chair as if he'd just concluded a lengthy piece of argumentation.

"Stamaty must have picked it up."

"He says he didn't," said Savage.

Auburn looked from one to the other in perplexity. "What's the file got to do with anything? He wasn't killed with a file. And it has to be there somewhere."

"That's just the point," said Kestrel. "It isn't there anywhere. I went over all the tools on the floor, on the workbench, and in the racks, looking for prints. I didn't see anything resembling this tool."

Auburn sighed. "So what's your theory?"

"It isn't a theory." Kestrel loved to quibble over the meanings of words. "Somebody obviously removed that file before I got there. It wasn't Stamaty."

"So it must have been Skelph."

"That's brute logic talking," nodded Savage, "but Sergeant Kestrel has a different idea."

"Nobody's been in that loft since Gannish fell," said Kestrel. "If the killer was still in the store when Dollinger and Krasnoy got there night before last, he must have gone back up the rope to hide."

"Assuming he knew how to climb a rope."

"Well, he had to have been up there before if he rigged the fall."

"Rigged it how?"

"I don't know. Maybe by wedging that plank with the file in Stamaty's picture so it would give way when Gannish stepped on it."

"In that case," objected Auburn, "he wouldn't have needed to be on the premises when Gannish died."

"I didn't say he was. He could've come back during the night—"

"Broken open the cash drawer," said Auburn, "hid in the loft when the cops came, slipped down again later in the morning and snatched the file out from under Stamaty's nose—"

"And went back up the rope," Savage finished for him. "Kestrel thinks he's still there."

"I didn't say that. But he could be."

"Then you'd better be armed when you go up that ladder," said Auburn. "And you are going first. I don't want to be accused of tampering with evidence." He stood up. "Has it occurred to anybody that maybe Gannish didn't fall? The killer could have worked him over with a monkey wrench right where we found him and then looped that

plank with the rope and yanked it down."

"Let's file that one under idle speculation until you've been up there," said Savage. "How do you figure the robbery fits in?"

"It doesn't," said Auburn. "It couldn't have been the motive for the murder—if it was murder—unless the killer has a couple of chips burned out. I think if we keep digging we're going to find somebody who wanted him dead."

"Which of the people you've interviewed do you figure had opportunity?"

"Mrs. Gannish's landlady gave her a pretty good alibi for Wednesday night," said Auburn, "without realizing she was doing it. That's no help if she booby-trapped the loft in advance. She and Skelph both deny ever having been up there. Pickrel can get up that rope like a squirrel, but I'm convinced he was genuinely shocked when I told him Gannish was dead."

"And of course," Kestrel reminded them, totally deadpan, "there's always the Passing Tramp Theory."

Because Dollinger and Krasnoy had blocked the damaged alley door shut, Auburn had to go in the front entrance to admit the two stalwart, taciturn groundskeepers from the Bureau of Parks who set up an extension ladder to the loft. Kestrel went up first, with his field kit, not a revolver, in one hand. Auburn waited until he was off the ladder before starting up.

The planks that formed the floor of the loft gave slightly when stepped on but seemed secure enough, even though they were ly-

ing loose across the horizontal members of the steel roof trusses, which were set on sixty inch centers. Rough racks and rougher shelving attached to the trusses held bicycle bodies, wheels, and other parts. Next to the climbing rope a continuous loop of chain equipped with hooks and a wire basket ran over a pulley for raising and lowering freight.

The light was poor, and Auburn had his flashlight on before Kestrel even got his out of his case. The first thing they found was a hatch opening onto the roof. It was latched on the inside, but experimentation showed that the latch caught whenever the hatch was closed. The roof was flat and empty except for a few scraps of rusty iron. There was abundant evidence that Gannish had used it as an open-air paint shop. The roof of the adjoining bar was on the same level, and from there a stationary ladder led down to the alley.

They decided to record the serial numbers of some of the bike bodies so that Robbery could check them against their lists of bikes reported stolen. In moving these Auburn discovered about twenty plastic bottles full of pills, labeled in Spanish.

After Kestrel went down the ladder to call the Vice Squad from his van, Auburn stood on the end plank and looked down the length of the gently swaying rope to the floor below. The men from the Bureau of Parks were sitting in their truck in the alley, and the shop was empty. Auburn grasped the rope with both hands and swung out over empty space.

He didn't get down as gracefully as Gannish or Pickrel would have done it, but he didn't break any bones either. The palms of his hands stung like fire, and he held them up and blew on them.

The personnel director at Zwelfinger's was just leaving for lunch, but she turned Auburn over to an underling who probably wouldn't be an underling for long. In ten minutes he had the information he wanted, and in another fifteen he was on Skelph's doorstep.

Skelph lived in three rooms over a Pakistani food carry-out where the aroma of cooking was overpowering and the rent no doubt correspondingly low. Auburn went straight to the point. Skelph held out briefly. When assured that he wouldn't be charged, he handed over the goods at once.

Back at headquarters Auburn had lunch in the canteen—passing up leftover chili in favor of leftover Salisbury steak—before reporting to Lieutenant Savage.

"Do you know what this stuff is?" asked Savage, pointing to plastic bottles of pills stacked on his desk. "Anabolic steroids, the kind athletes and bodybuilders take. Smuggled in from Mexico."

"So that's what Pickrel was after. He must have been supplying it to Gannish, who slipped it to kids in return for stolen bikes. Skelph swears he's never been up in that loft, but he got the idea from neighborhood scuttlebutt that Gannish had hard drugs up there."

"Did you see Skelph today?"

"Just left him." Auburn laid a

heavy package wrapped in newspaper on Savage's desk next to the pills. "There's the file Kestrel's been stewing about. Along with other tools from Gannish's shop."

Savage opened one end of the package. "So Skelph did snatch it, after all?"

"Apparently he's a chronic pilferer. When he figured he was out of a job at the bike shop, he took his severance pay in the form of whatever he could shove up his sleeves. Not only under Stamaty's nose but Kestrel's and Dollinger's and mine. Do you know where Kestrel is?"

"I thought he was with you."

"I want to get him over to that bike shop before he goes off duty."

"When did Kestrel ever miss anything the first time around?"

"He missed this."

At a quarter to two Auburn was back at Mrs. Gannish's. She appeared calm, but he got the impression she was controlling herself with an enormous effort. "I won't take more than a few minutes of your time," he said, "and I hope you're not going to waste mine. When was the last time you climbed that rope at the bicycle shop?"

She glowered at him in silence from her dark corner for a long time before answering. "Never. Why would you ask me that?"

"You wear a perfume called Entendu, right? Which you buy at a thirty percent discount at work?"

"Yes, but what—"

"This morning I climbed down that rope. A little faster than I planned. When I blew on my hands, I smelled Entendu."

"And you think that means I

climbed the rope?" Auburn couldn't be sure whether she was struggling to keep from laughing or trying to smile and not quite bringing it off. "Dar must have gotten some of it on his hands from me or my clothes."

"I had a look at the resume you submitted when you applied for your job at Zwelfinger's. You were on a prize-winning gymnastics team in high school."

"That was a long time ago. And I never did any aerial work. I get dizzy going down an escalator."

He almost bought it. Then he remembered her remark yesterday about telling people she was sorry when she didn't mean it. A claims adjuster for a department store is practically a professional actor. "Let me see your hands," he said.

"I don't have to show you my hands."

"You kept looking at them yesterday. That's because you'd left some skin behind when you came down the rope the night before. The skin cells we recovered from the rope are on their way right now to the state forensic lab for DNA typing."

Suddenly he realized that what she was struggling to mask wasn't guilt but a restless eagerness to confess that guilt. He hastened to recite the Miranda warning.

"I didn't mean to kill him," she said. "You've got to believe that. It started out as an argument. Dar was never home in the evenings. He spent everything he took in at the shop on tools and stock and left me to pay all the household bills out of my salary. I was feeling resentful and angry, and I went to

the shop Wednesday night—"

"Went there how?"

"In my car. About eleven or eleven thirty. I parked in the alley and went in the back with a spare key I had. Dar was in the loft. I started needling him, and when he ignored me, I climbed up the rope. In order to get into a corner he had moved the floorboard he was standing on so that neither end of it was supported. I stepped onto it and he had to move nearer to the end to keep it from tilting."

She wasn't acting now. "We started yelling at each other. I kept inching back, making him do the same, as if we were on a giant seesaw twenty feet from the ground. We got madder and wilder, and pretty soon we were screaming the most hateful things we could think of because we realized that we couldn't both come out of it alive."

"Dar weighed a lot more than I do. When he got to his end of the board, gravity took over. I jumped for the rope, and he went down with the board."

"I could tell he was dead. The board had knocked the phone off the hook. I came home and kept calling the shop every few minutes, figuring that if anybody found him they'd use the phone to call the police and then hang up; and then I'd know—"

"Did you take the money?"

"It's my money. I'm his heir."

"Not if you're convicted of murdering him."

"I didn't murder him. I just told you what happened. It was as much his fault as mine. It was—like a duel."

"That's illegal, too."

"You're not putting those handcuffs on me."

After taking her in, Auburn tracked down Kestrel by phone and asked him to check the rope to see if there really were any skin cells on it besides his own before she changed her story. Kestrel told him he'd been watching too much television.

He went to see Mrs. Sanzevar.

"I'm afraid you've lost your other tenant," he told her. "Mrs. Gannish just confessed to murdering her husband."

Mrs. Sanzevar pursed her lips and shook her head. "I'm not surprised. I thought that's why you were here yesterday."

"It's strange that you didn't hear Mrs. Gannish drive away late Wednesday night and come back after midnight."

She looked off into the distance. "I wasn't under oath."

"In other words, you were trying to give her an alibi. Why?"

"That picture on the right in the black frame is my grandnephew Jason Batts. 'Dingo' the other boys called him. He was fifteen when he died. Fifteen. Of cancer of the liver, caused by these steroids the boys take to build up their muscles. He wouldn't tell the doctors where he got them, but his father finally got it out of him."

Her face clouded up, and Auburn saw a storm coming.

"That woman," she said, with a contemptuous jerk of her head toward the Gannishes' side of the double, "is just trash, but he was a monster, a perfect fiend, a tool of Satan—"

As Auburn made his escape, he wondered how long it would have been before Mrs. Sanzevar killed Dar Gannish herself if his wife hadn't beaten her to it.

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MISSING SOMETHING

Molly MacRae



My cousin Leona turns eighty next month. Which isn't especially old, but she's beginning to forget things. She's getting "whiffy" as we politely say in our family. Most of her whiffiness shows in little ways that don't really make much difference. Like she told me three times yesterday that the Garden Club is meeting at her house next week. She won't forget the meeting, she just probably won't remember not to tell me about it a few more times. And ask me if I'll be there. Which I won't because I'm not and never have been a member of the Garden Club. But that's okay, that doesn't really bother me. What I do worry about is when she'll start leaving the water running or forgetting to turn a burner off on the stove. There's precedent for that among my older relatives. That seems to be the way we go in our family.

My sister Bitsy and I approach our worries from different directions. That's the way it always goes in our family. "Margaret, you turn everything into a joke or a funny story." That was Bitsy appalled on the phone when I told her about Cousin Leona trying to remember which of us was older, Bitsy or I. I'd told Leona that I was definitely the taller and that was all that mattered. I shouldn't have told Bitsy. What she lacks in height she doesn't make up for in a sense of humor.

"And it's not as though half an inch makes any difference anyway," said Bitsy, getting in the last word before slamming down the receiver. Well, for some of us it obviously does.

Bitsy takes a militaristic approach to the worries of Leona's old age. She's manning her mental barricades. She's fending off the potential sapping of her own cerebral powers with a self-improvement regimen that involves some complicated equation of bottled mineral water, organic vegetables, and attacking every corner of her life with a very chic New Age spiritual panacea. She's added the further complication of insisting on yet another attempt in her lifelong quest to get me to shape up. And that's where my little self-improvement effort comes in. While Bitsy improves herself via the vegetation/meditation/irrigation route, I'm making an effort to improve myself by not disparaging Bitsy's efforts. Or strangling her.

Cousin Leona lives next door to me. She is actually my late mother's cousin, which makes her a second or once removed or something I've never bothered to be entirely clear on. Dear Abby could set me straight. Bitsy could, too, but I don't think I'll call her right now and ask her. Leona's house is crowded with the African violets she dotes on the way some people do small dogs or precocious grandchildren. She can't abide either of those mild plagues, and Bitsy and I get as tired of hearing about her violets as we would micro-dogs or grandchildren. But the three of us actually cope pretty well within the strained bonds of familial relationship. I picture us as connected by three rubber bands. Sometimes we're loose and comfortable with each other, and sometimes we're a little stretched. Some-



day I wonder if I might snap altogether, but so far so good.

Leona has taken to tottering over to my house around the middle of each morning. My place is crowded with books. I've turned it into the dream so many people have of running a bookstore in a lovely old house. The reality is that living at work can be hell, but what the hell, it's mine and I like it.

If I can stop what I'm doing, I usually make Leona a cup of tea. Otherwise she totters out again and goes about her little old lady business.

This morning Leona and Bitsy arrived together. "I've brought you a surprise, Margaret," said Bitsy in her endearingly aggressive way. "Here."

"Well, gosh, Bitsy. Thanks. Leona, would you like a slice of . . ."

"It's zucchini biscotti. And it's for your customers," Bitsy said, taking the plate from my hand and looking around for a place to put it. "I think it would be a great idea if you started serving coffee and little nibbles. You know all the big bookstores do."

"Thank you," I said between quietly gnashing teeth. "I do know."

"Oh, and I have plenty of extra zucchini. Would you like some?"

"No! No, that's all right, Bitsy." She's convinced that her evening meditations in the zucchini football field she planted are what account for the superabundance of squash now gracing every flat surface in her house.

"Well! You know, Margaret, it wouldn't hurt you to eat more fresh vegetables!"

"Bitsy, please, not now."

Her mouth screwed up tight, and her eyes took on a gimlet glare. I braced myself for a blast.

But something amazing happened. Bitsy closed her eyes. She took a deep breath, held it for several counts, and then let it out again, slowly and evenly, with a peaceful little sigh.

"That's fine, that's fine. Margaret, I'll just nip into the kitchen and start a pot of coffee to go with the biscotti. This is my gift to you. I'm happy to share my ideas with you." And with that she turned and floated out of the room.

"Wow," I said to Leona as we stared at her retreating back. "She was . . ."

"Serene," said Leona. "I think she's growing as a person. Margaret dear, I know you're usually the first to loathe admitting that Bitsy is right about anything, but this nibble idea has merit."

"Yeah, yeah, I know." I too can show personal growth. "In fact, what would really be good is if I made samples from recipes in some of the new cookbooks."

"Or magazines, dear. There happens to be a recipe for zucchini biscotti in the latest *Herb Life*. Now, do you need anything from the garden center? Bone meal for your bulbs?"

I don't have any bulbs.

"No, thanks, Cousin Leona. My bone meal level is fine. I'll see you later."

I cleared space for the plate of biscotti on the counter near the cash register. Then, to show further evidence of personal growth and to give

Bitsy her due, I added a little sign saying, "Have a bite of Bitsy's biscotti." It was too cute, but even personal growth can have its downside.

Bitsy returned with the coffee in an insulated carafe. She looks unnervingly like her role model, June Cleaver, sometimes. Last year for Christmas I made her a sweatshirt with WWJCD on the front and a picture of June on the back. I haven't seen it since.

But Bitsy beamed at the sign and put the coffee next to the plate.

"Cups?" she asked brightly.

"I'll rustle some up. Thanks, Bitsy, this'll be great."

"Bye!" she chirruped, and was gone. Amazing.

I really could get into this, I thought as I absentmindedly ate another piece of the zucchini biscotti. Then I caught sight of my reflection in the glass of the front door and sadly realized another downside to personal growth. It obviously works both figuratively and literally, and my figure would literally go up a dress size a week if I ate all the samples myself. So standing across the room from the plate on the counter I started leafing through the low-fat no-fat cookbooks, trying not to gain weight just from smelling the ink.

Between tending to the customers who wandered in out of the glorious summer sunshine and drooling through recipes I would be either crazy to attempt or crazy to tempt myself with, the morning passed pleasantly enough. I even sold several copies of *Herb Life* with the zucchini biscotti recipe. But I couldn't shake the image of Bitsy,

serene. The vision of her marshaling her emotions like that kept replaying in my mind, and I couldn't stop shaking my head over it. Was I missing something? Bitsy has lived her entire life in bold italics, her every statement highlighted in fluorescent pink. Could this be zucchini serenity? Maybe I should start browsing the bottled water aisle at the grocery. Still, Bitsy's serenity would have to linger a little longer before I asked to borrow her meditation tapes.

Along about noon Leona called.

"Margaret dear, I'm sorry to bother you when I know you're so busy."

"That's all right, Cousin Leona, what's up?"

"It's the strangest thing. I can't find my car. I think maybe it's been stolen."

"You're kidding! Where are you?" I asked.

"Well, I went to the garden center and got a few things I needed. Oh, and two bags of that bone meal you wanted because it was on sale. Then I thought I'd stop by the mall. You know I really do hate the way traffic zips around out there, but the Senior Citizens Task Force is doing their free cholesterol screenings and I like to support them. And I parked outside Penney's because that's where I always do, but now it's not there."

"Are you sure you didn't park it somewhere else?"

There was an uncomfortable pause. Keen though Leona has always been to remind me of everything three or more times, she is sensitive about her own failing memory.



"Did you talk to the mall security people?" I asked contritely.

"I didn't like to bother them, dear. And I didn't want them thinking I'm just a batty old lady."

My mother raised me better than to say something at this point.

"I did try calling Bitsy, dear, because I know you have the shop to run. But she's not home."

Figured.

"Cousin Leona, could you take a taxi home? I can't leave the store right now, but later this afternoon I'll take you back there and we'll look around. For clues. Or something." Her car is one of those nice, sensible, compact jobs that looks like two hundred other cars in any given parking lot. And there are usually five hundred more that you can eventually pick out as not yours only because they're really some other nondescript shade of the same metallic finish. I was willing to bet her car was out there.

"Well . . ." She sounded dubious.

"If we don't find anything, we'll report it stolen." Leona likes real policemen.

"All right, then, dear. Thank you. I'll see you later."

Swell. I wondered where Bitsy was. Off spreading benevolence and serenity somewhere, no doubt. I realized I was glaring at the zucchini biscotti. It was only a barely adequate Bitsy substitute, though, so I turned my back on it in a huff and went to the kitchen to eat lunch.

That's where I discovered what Bitsy was really up to. Spreading zucchini. There was a small mountain of it on my kitchen table. I knew I'd missed something this morning

while Bitsy did her serene zucchini queen bit. I'd missed her extra-large handbag. And her sneakiness. Damn.

I didn't make a zucchini sandwich for lunch or a zucchini anything else, and after enjoying that fact and several hundred fat-laden calories, I felt better. I was even jolly when one of the customers who'd bought a copy of *Herb Life* brought it back saying the recipe for zucchini biscotti had been torn out. These things happen sometimes, so I gave her an intact copy and she left smiling.

It was hard to be as blithe when a copy of *Vegetarian News* was returned later with several pages ripped out. And although I tried not to let the customer see it, when a copy of *Bountiful Garden* came back with a page of recipes missing, I was hard pressed not to be downright cranky.

I'm naturally suspicious. Along with sarcasm it's one of my more winning traits. So when I looked to see exactly what recipes were missing from the magazines, I wasn't, somehow, surprised. Zucchini marmalade. Zucchini tofu. Zucchini chow-chow. Zucchini panini.

An obvious solution to the mystery of the missing recipes was that Bitsy, in some kind of zucchini haze, had come searching for more ways to deal with her overabundance. But I couldn't believe that. Bitsy might lead her life on the margin, and she fairly regularly crushes my joie de vivre under the heels of her pointy shoes, but the beauty of Bitsy is that she is predictable and she doesn't really set out to be destruc-



tive. Still, having so recently experienced an alien vegetable encounter in my kitchen, I wondered. I know if I had that much zucchini lurking in the underbrush I'd be tempted to take desperate measures.

I wanted to talk to her about Cousin Leona, anyway, and as I don't usually shrink from a little Bitsy baiting, I called and left a message on her machine that she couldn't refuse.

"Margaret!" she later blared into the phone that I hadn't held far enough from my ear for auditory health or comfort before realizing it was she calling back. "Of course I have more biscotti! I'll bring it right over!" She was delighted. I could tell. I rubbed my ear and thought of a cunning and safe way of finding out if she was systematically vandalizing my magazine stand.

"Margaret, don't be ridiculous. Zucchini tofu sounds repulsive! Can you imagine what color it would be?"

Good old reliable Bitsy. How could I ever have imagined she would even look at such a recipe? Thank goodness I'd only had the bad taste to ask if she'd heard of the stuff and hadn't actually asked her to share a recipe for it. Her reaction was everything I'd hoped for and expected. I still didn't know who was pilfering recipes, but it was comforting knowing that Bitsy's zucchini fetish hadn't dulled either her morals or her sense of style.

Her sensitivity towards anyone else's infirmity was another story.

"Bitsy, have you talked to Leona this afternoon?"

"No. I noticed her car's gone, though. She must be out and about somewhere."

"Actually, she says her car is missing."

"What?"

"Well, she thinks maybe it was stolen."

"She left it unlocked, did she? Do you know how many times I've warned her about that? I've told her over and over."

And over and over.

"I even threatened to have Rodney drop her insurance."

Rodney is Bitsy's husband. He's an insurance agent. Threatening Leona with Rodney's wrath would be like menacing her with a comfortably worn teddy bear decked out in sans a belt golf clothes. A nerve-racking experience maybe, but nothing she couldn't laugh about later.

"Bitsy, I think she just doesn't remember where she parked it. I'll take her over to the mall later, and I'm sure we'll find it. But I'm getting worried. I think we're going to have to start thinking about not letting her drive any more."

"Why? She isn't dangerous. She never goes over twenty miles an hour. What *I'm* doing is eating brain-building foods. It's probably too late for Leona, but you should try it and at least she could be taking those memory supplements."

"Gecko Baboon Oil?"

"Margaret! Don't joke about things you're unwilling to open your mind to. How did Leona get home? And why didn't she call me?"

"You weren't home. She hates your machine."

"Well!"



"Calm down, Bitsy. Remember—be one with the Great Zucchini." She looked like she could personally steam my zucchini.

And then it happened again. I saw it with my own eyes and was transfixed. Her prim little pucker receded into a smile. Lightning stopped shooting out of her fingertips. Her hair relaxed.

"I'm sure you will find her car," she practically hummed. "And think about this, Margaret: if you remember where you were when you left something, then you haven't lost it."

That's when I lost it.

"What the hell does *that* mean?"

"Margaret, you don't need to swear at me. I'm only helping."

"Bitsy, have you noticed, at all, that your way of helping doesn't involve Leona? You're looking for some kind of cosmic solution that has nothing to do with the little old lady who used to tie our shoes. You're just avoiding the messiness you might find if you really looked at the situation. Your aphorisms and profound pronouncements don't mean anything to someone who can't remember where she parked her car. And they don't add anything to a conversation, either."

Once again I prove I'm adept at personal shrinkage.

Bitsy, eyes popping, left. I closed up shop for the day and slunk over to Leona's for our car-finding mission.

"You look upset, dear," Leona greeted me at her door. "I'm sorry to put you to this trouble."

"Oh no, that's all right, Leona. I was just shrieking at Bitsy, and I'm

feeling deflated. Do you think I'll ever learn?"

"No, but I wouldn't worry about it, dear. It's just part of you being you and Bitsy being Bitsy. You've been at it as long as I can remember. It'll blow over. It always does. And she'll enjoy forgiving you. Now, shall I drive or you?"

"I'll drive. Your car is missing, remember?"

"Is it? Of course I remember, dear. Let's go."

"Do you happen to know your license plate number?"

"I haven't bothered to remember one of those since 1960."

"I probably don't know mine, either. You just show me where you usually park, and we'll see what we find."

What we found was cars all obviously cloned from a single dentless bumper, all neatly laid out in rows that undulated gently towards the horizon. A long evening loomed ahead of us.

"There, see that pretty crape myrtle? That's the row I like to park in. But I looked, and my car isn't there."

I found an empty space under the crape myrtle and got out to reconnoiter. Leona stopped to pull a few weeds from around the crape myrtle and then trailed after me.

"Isn't that your car next to the one with the baby seat in it?" I asked her.

"I don't have a baby seat in my car."

"No, but isn't *this* one yours? Sure it is."

"Margaret, this car is all locked up, and there's a bag of groceries in the back seat."

“That’s not your stuff from the garden center?”

“I distinctly remember asking the man at the garden center to put your bags of bone meal in the trunk.”

My bags of bone meal. I could see bulbs in my future. I peered into the back seat. And then I straightened back up feeling more like my old self again.

“Cousin Leona, may I have your keys?”

“Of course, dear.”

I unlocked the car.

“I don’t understand. I didn’t lock my car.”

I pulled out the bag of groceries. Zucchini.

“Bitsy did.”

“Bitsy did what?”

“Locked your car for you.”

“Is that her zucchini?”

“It looks like yours now.”

“Well, then it’s a good thing I have all these wonderful recipes.” Leona pulled a small stash of magazine clippings out of her pocket.

“Oh, Leona.”

“Am I missing something, dear? Why are you laughing?”

“It’s not as messy as crying. Come on, I think I’ll drive both ways today. You and your zucchini hop back into my car.”

“What about mine?”

“Bitsy knows where it is. I think we’ll go roust her from her zucchini dreams.”

I popped Leona’s trunk and got my bags of bone meal.

“Cousin Leona? What kind of bulbs are your favorite?”

“Daffodils, dear. Daffies, my mother called them when she started getting whiffy.”

“Daffies. That sounds about right. Will you help me plant some?”

“Of course, dear. We’ll put them in next to your tulips. After the Garden Club meeting at my house next week.”

“Perfect. Let’s go home.”

“Shall I drive or you?”

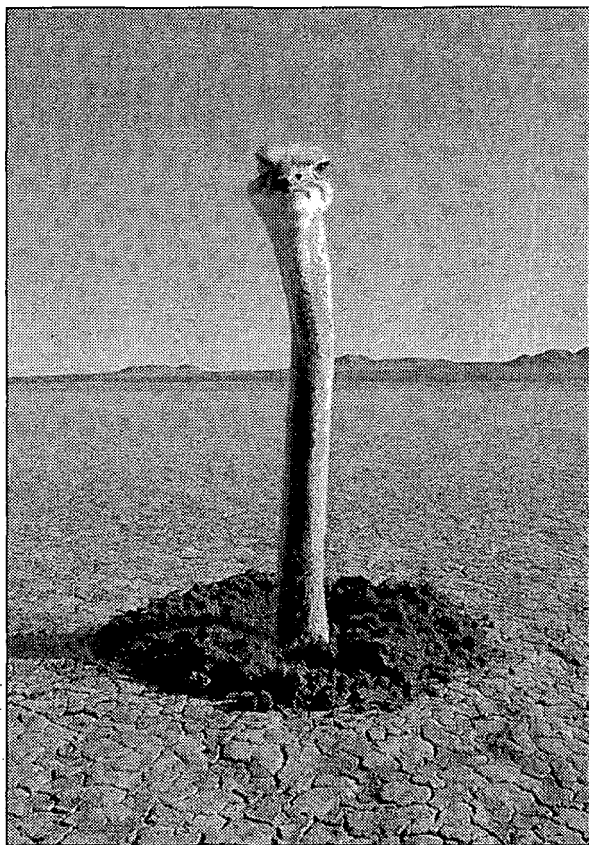
“I’ll drive.”

“Thank you, dear.”

“If you’ll tie my shoe.”

“Don’t be silly, Margaret.”

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



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No questions. No comments. Just keep it to yourself. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less, and be sure to include a crime) based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to AHMM, Dell Magazines, 475 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10016. Please label your entry "May Contest," and be sure your name and address are written on the story you submit. If possible, please also include your Social Security number.

The winning entry for the December Mysterious Photograph contest will be found on page 141.

FICTION

ATTITUDE THING

William J. Carroll, Jr.

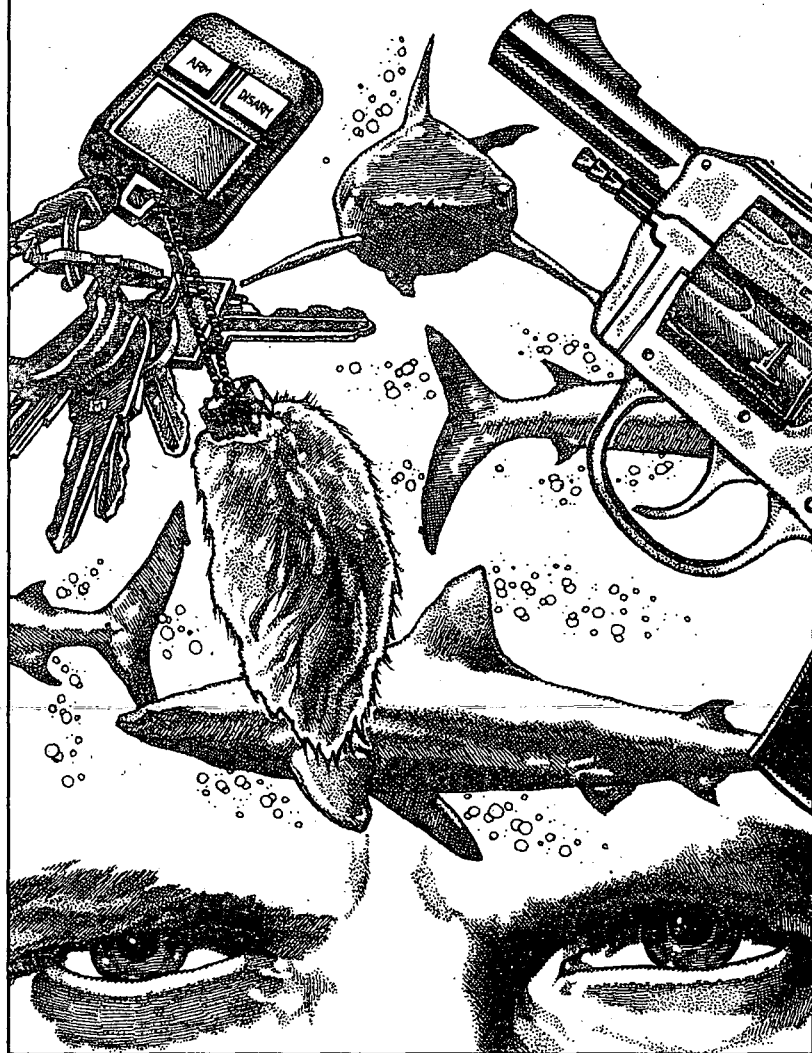


Illustration by Ron Chironna

Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine 5/00.

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“This was no *shark* attack!” the young pathologist announced with high indignation; then he grinned.

Villareal, the slightly older detective who was with me, snorted in amusement.

I said, “Uh-huh.”

The pathologist chuckled at his own lame humor, put aside the plastic sheet that had covered Husting’s severed head and motioned us closer.

“Three times,” he said, in answer to my earlier question. “Shot twice under the left eye—” he pointed his scalpel at the area “—and once in the upper palate.” He tilted Husting’s head a little and pried open his mouth. “See?”

I glanced into the mouth, couldn’t really see anything, but believed him.

“Weapon used was a .22,” Villareal told me. “No suspect wounds on the other parts of him. The parts we have, anyway.”

I glanced at the two stainless steel pans on an adjacent table that held an arm and shoulder and some other bits of body. “And these parts were recovered when?”

“Found on the shore at the Border Field State Park two weeks ago, July fourth,” Villareal said.

“We were just about to cremate these remains when the head finally turned up,” the young M.E. said, “in the stomach of a shark.”

“*Jaws*,” the policeman agreed. “A great white.”

“Which was found where?”

“Imperial Beach,” Villareal said. “Washed in just after a storm last

week. Some kids from UCSD went down to dissect it or something—find out why it died—and out pops the head.”

“Dental records I.D.’d the head as Husting,” the pathologist said, “and DNA connected the other body parts with the head.”

“I see,” I said, looking at it.

Thinking that you’d come to a bad end when only dental records and DNA can put a name to you, and nothing else could have named Husting.

Husting, Allen, Colonel, USA, ret. RIP.

I looked at Villareal. “So how did he die?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“The shark.”

“Oh.” He shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“Something he ate?” the pathologist suggested.

I looked at him and smiled.

“Anything else, Mr. Virginiak?” Villareal asked.

“No,” I told him.

I could just as well have read the autopsy report instead of getting a guided tour of Husting’s remains, but Villareal had a show-and-tell method of explaining everything. Arranging this tour of mangled body parts had been his idea.

But now it was over, so I thanked the M.E. for his trouble, giving the shot-up, chewed-over, partially digested, and semidissected head of Allen Husting a last look.

“Had a real bad day, didn’t he?” the pathologist offered.

Which was a fair assumption. Husting’s 201 file had told me only that he’d been forty-nine at the

time of his death, divorced, no children, no next of kin, and had lived in San Diego since his retirement five years earlier.

Not much to tell me how his days had been, but he was bound to have had better ones than his last.

Not that I cared really, one way or another.

Villareal led me out of the morgue and back into the bright southern California sunshine and the bustle of downtown San Diego.

"You didn't know the man, did you?" Villareal asked me—probably a half hour too late.

"He's just a name on a file," I assured him.

"Hard way to end up," he said. "You know. Fish food."

"Uh-huh."

"Hungry?"

I told him I could eat, so he took me to a street-side taco vendor, where we grabbed a couple and ate them on a bench that overlooked a busy mall. Mine was too salty, though, so I ate only half and started feeding a couple of pigeons with the remainder. I could probably wrap up this business today, I thought, and catch a night flight back to Fort Lewis, assuming I got enough facts to make the report I'd write look like I'd been busy.

"I guess we can rule out suicide, eh?" Villareal said around a mouthful of taco.

I looked at him.

Villareal, John, Inspector, San Diego County sheriff's office. Thirtyish, tall, dark, beetle-browed, and "smart as a whip," his boss had told me when I'd called before coming down from Fort Lewis.

He probably was, but I was getting pretty tired of the dead jokes, and I put that into the look I gave him.

Which he was smart enough, anyway, to see.

"Sorry," he said, finishing the last of his taco.

I shrugged. "What do you think?" I asked, going back to my pigeons.

"Well, I'll tell you first what we know, okay?"

"Okay."

He lighted a small, narrow cigar, sat back on the bench, and sighed smoke.

"What we know is that Hustling was in the market for a boat."

I nodded.

"So," he went on, "he goes to a local broker, who finds him a fifty footer—the *Mariquita Linda*. It's kind of a miniature *Queen Mary*, I've seen a picture of it, and it's a 'steal,' the broker told me, at two hundred thousand. Hustling tells him he wants to take her out for a test run, and the broker gives him the keys."

"That was July first?" I asked, mentally starting that report.

"Right. July third the broker reports to the Coast Guard that Hustling never came back. That same day the boat comes ashore just north of Rosarita—no one aboard. Apparently it's a little dinged from coming aground on a reef but is otherwise seaworthy."

"But you people haven't been down there yet?"

"Mexican army seized the boat," he explained, "and there's a big tug-of-war going on down there over jurisdiction. The *policía judicial*

federal want in, and until it's all settled, no one goes aboard. They're supposed to be bringing up a forensic team from Mexico City, but as far as we know it hasn't happened yet, and they won't let us near it."

I nodded.

"Anyway," Villareal continued, "July fourth, body parts start turning up and because the Coast Guard had inquired about any John Doe water-related deaths, we figured they belonged to Husting and that he'd been the victim of a shark attack. But last week the head comes out of that great white—with bullet holes—and then we *know* it's Husting, and what looked like a shark killing turns into murder."

I spread around the last of my taco crumbs.

"Your boss said you had a theory that this was all involved with some drug trafficking business?"

"Well," Villareal admitted, "there's no hard evidence, but it's an idea that fits with some other facts."

"Such as?"

He thought that over, but instead of an explanation he gave me a look.

"What?" I asked.

"Your being here," he said.

"What about it?"

He wagged his head. "Is there—something about Husting that you know and I don't?"

"Nothing relevant, I think."

"You think?"

I shook my head. "Before he retired, Husting had been in possession of highly classified material, and when someone like that dies in suspicious circumstances, we sometimes give it a look-over, that's all."

"Sometimes?"

"Sometimes," I confirmed, though I could not, offhand, think of another time.

In fact, we rarely investigated such matters, relying instead on reports from local law enforcement; but it had been Chavez's idea to send me here, and he'd had no good reason for doing so.

No reason aside from the fact that he'd been angry with me, and he'd had no good reason for that either.

I did not, however, tell this to Villareal, so he probably thought I was keeping something relevant from him. But that was his problem.

"When my boss told me to chauffeur you around," he said, "I was under the impression you'd be co-operating with us here."

"Cooperation is my middle name."

"Is it," he said doubtfully.

I shook my head again. "It's just routine, John—trust me."

Villareal's beetle-brow look thickened into a frown.

I only smiled.

He only looked doubtful.

"So," I said, finally.

He kept his frown going for a moment more, then got to his feet. "Let's go take a look at Husting's house." I sighed at the thought of the effort. "What?" he asked.

"More show and tell?"

He smiled with little humor in it. "Unless you're too busy."

I wasn't, naturally, but I wished he'd just tell me what he thought and save us the trip. Not that I had anything better to do, so I made no objection and let him drive us south through the city and over the long bridge to Coronado Island.

Which—especially today—had

that postcard-perfect look to it everywhere my eyes traveled.

"You been here before, Mr. Virgin-
iak?" Villareal asked when we got
off the bridge.

"Many times."

"Pretty place," he said.

"Uh-huh."

I felt his eyes on my face as he
turned down the road that edged
the boat-crowded marina.

"Supposed to get some rain to-
day," he said.

"No kidding."

He snorted.

I looked out over the harbor, the
sun reflecting so brightly on the
water that it hurt the eyes.

"You got a problem with me, Mr.
Virgin-
iak?" Villareal asked.

"No problem, John," I replied.

"You sure?"

"I'm sure."

"'Cause if you've got a problem
with me, let me know and we can
work it out, okay?"

I looked back out at the harbor.

"No problem, John," I assured him.

"Just want to get this case over
with, you know?"

I felt him give me another look,
but then he shut up and just drove.

Drove us along a row of very up-
scale waterfront homes edged with
eucalyptus and looking very good in
the bright sunlight. In front of one
Villareal stopped the car, parked,
and said, "Nice neighborhood, eh?"

I nodded.

"Most expensive real estate on
the island," he added, grabbing his
attaché case and getting out of the
car. I followed him, looking around
at the newish houses, the bright,
white boats that lounged together

along the pier, the *National Geo-
graphic* view of the harbor and the
city beyond, and I could almost
smell the money.

Husting indeed had had better
days than his last.

The young policeman led me up
a stone walkway to the door of a
white stucco, green-roofed house,
with a late-model red Porsche
parked in a gated carport beside it.

"That car belong to Husting?" I
asked.

Villareal nodded. "Nothing but
the best for your colonel, Mr. Vir-
gin-
iak."

He unlocked the front door,
which opened on an interior that—
before it had been turned inside
out and tossed upside-down, of
course—had the same air of mon-
ey as its exterior.

"We kind of made a mess," Vil-
lareal told me. "Found nothing,
though."

I nodded. "My" colonel certainly
did go for the best.

The house was actually one large
high-ceilinged room with an upper
level bedroom on a deck to the left,
a high-tech looking kitchen to the
right, a sunken living room floored
in cherry parquet in the middle,
huge oaken beams crossing over-
head, and floor-to-roof window walls
that overlooked the marina.

Villareal stepped down into the
living room, done in black leather
furnishings with a massive enter-
tainment center, and sat down on a
sofa. "So?"

"So," I said. "It's a very nice place."

"Husting paid cash for it a year
ago," he told me. "Three hundred
ninety thousand dollars."

"Did he."

He then pulled two folders out of his attaché case and handed me one. "This is Husting's latest brokerage account statement."

I flipped through the pages, noting some high numbers.

Villareal said, "He's got a nice mix of mutuals and stocks that put his net worth at around three hundred fifty thousand."

"He saved his pennies," I said.

"Right. You know what an army colonel's pension runs, Mr. Virgin-iak?"

I didn't, offhand.

"Husting's retirement check was two thousand seven hundred fifty a month," he told me. "His monthly tab at the officers' club on base here was only a little less than that."

I handed the folder back. "He obviously had another source of income."

"You got that right," Villareal said, handing me the other folder.

This one contained Husting's bank statements going back three years. Two deposits were in the low six figures; every couple of months there were additional deposits, all for various five figure amounts of no less than ten thousand each.

"Those deposits," Villareal said, "are checks issued by Husting's ex-wife, drawn against her business account."

"His ex-wife?"

"Mercedes Enriquez—and, no, they're not part of any divorce settlement." He smiled. "She says they were simply loans she made him."

I looked over all the statements and estimated the total deposits at close to three quarters of a million.

"A lot of money," I said, handing back the folder, seating myself in a chair, and taking out my pipe.

Villareal put away his folders. "I think Husting was using his wife's business to launder money. That he made his money smuggling drugs into the country is merely a reasonable assumption."

Not an unreasonable thought, I thought. "What kind of business does she own?" I asked.

"Speedy-G's," he told me. "Chain of dry-cleaning stores here in south-ern California."

"Must be successful," I said.

"Oh, very," he agreed. "Actually, she's a kind of local business celebrity. She's been written up in a national news magazine, in fact."

"Is she a suspect?"

"For the killing?"

I shrugged.

He moved his head in a seminod. "Before their divorce he'd been arrested twice for assaulting her, so we naturally looked at her as a suspect at first—executed a search warrant, questioned her at length, checked out her alibi—but we came up empty." He shrugged slightly. "She's not exactly forthcoming about anything, but if she'd been involved in drug running with Husting, keeping quiet would be the way to go."

"She has an alibi?"

"Not really," he replied. "Her story is that she met with Husting the morning he took the boat out, but she left him alive and never saw him again. Said that afterwards she drove up to Riverside checking out some new store locations, but that can't be verified."

"That's not much of an alibi."

He made his face look doubtful. "There's an outside chance she did him," he said, "but my money's on a dope deal gone wrong."

I puffed on my pipe and looked out over the harbor. It was alive with sailboats.

"So?" Villareal prompted.

I looked back at him.

Thinking I was a bit tired of this young man's enthusiasm and wishing I'd been able to think of the right words to say to Chavez that would have kept me at my desk.

"What next, Mr. Virginiak?"

I sighed. "I suppose," I said with a tad of tedium I just couldn't keep out of my voice, "I should talk with the widow."

The young man gave me a curious look. "Is all this boring you?"

In a way it was. Not this job particularly, just things in general, but that was my business, so I said, "Not at all," and that was that, and we left. Got back in Villareal's car, went back over the bridge and south toward National City.

Which was not a long drive, but it was made longer by the silence between us.

I supposed the young man didn't like me much, and that was reasonable. I wasn't feeling very likeable just then. Hadn't for a while, in fact, not since . . .

Well, I just wasn't feeling like myself, or rather, I felt like a *new* self and I wasn't sure why, though I kept telling myself it was just age.

In the back of my mind, however, I suspected that something more serious had occurred. An emotional or attitude problem that was as

vague to me as its source. A serious something, however, that I hadn't really yet faced because—well—I just hadn't.

In the meantime I just went with the flow of my new self, and if others didn't like it, they could lump it.

In any case, I wasn't feeling all that likeable, and as likeable and enthusiastic as Villareal was, he bored me. Bored me and he knew it and didn't like me for it.

But of course I didn't care.

So we were quiet together on the "short" drive to National City, but as long as our silence seemed to make that trip, the neighborhood to which Villareal drove us was about as far away from Coronado as you can get.

Dilapidated, paint-peeled houses and lowrise apartment buildings, abandoned stores and occasional bars, crowding along narrow, overparked streets where every other vehicle had that stripped-of-anything-of-value look.

Villareal turned us into the parking lot of a two story L-shaped apartment building, nodded at the upper floor, and said, "That's the place."

"Your celebrity businesswoman lives here?"

"Doesn't exactly flaunt her wealth, does she?"

We got out of the car. At the corner of the drive two dogs were scavenging in a tipped-over trashcan.

"Maybe business *isn't* so good," I said.

"You want to see her alone?"

"Why?"

He sighed, showing that he was now a little bored with me. "She

might be more willing to talk to you without me along taking notes."

Which made sense, I supposed. In fact, Villareal was a very sensible fellow, and I almost wished I weren't draining him of what enthusiasm he had for solving this case.

I left him by the car smoking his little cigar and went up the stairs to the door of the corner apartment and knocked.

Heard someone say, "Just a minute," from inside, waited a long moment; then the door opened, and a woman was standing there smiling at me.

"Mercedes Enriquez?"

"Yes?"

"I'm Warrant Officer Virginiak," I told her. "Army counter-intelligence." I showed her my identification. "I'm here about the death of your ex-husband."

Her smile shifted into neutral.

"I wonder if you might answer some questions?"

"My attorney has advised me not to say anything," she said.

"That's good advice."

Her smile shifted back. "But you want to ask me questions regardless."

"It's what I do, Ms. Enriquez."

I watched her think this over.

Thinking she was the kind of woman who was not at all hard to watch doing anything. Late thirties, tall, good figure in jeans and a white blouse, dark hair she wore pulled back in a businesslike bun; she had an even-featured face dominated by large, expressive eyes that just now had an uncertain look in them.

"How about this," I suggested. "I'll ask my questions, and you answer if you feel like it."

She gave that a shorter think-over, then shrugged, smiled, opened the door wider, and said, "Coffee?"

Which I told her sounded good, so she let me inside and guided me through a small, neatly kept living room onto a small eucalyptus shaded lanai just off an equally small kitchenette.

I sat at a table while she went in the kitchenette and got two mugs.

"Nice place," I told her while she fussed.

"You think so?" she asked.

I didn't really, but I didn't say so. "I've just come from your ex-husband's house on Coronado."

"Really," she said, giving me a look as she poured coffee from a carafe.

"He lived very well."

"Allen had very expensive tastes," she said ruefully, then looked at me again. "You take it black, don't you?"

I nodded, wondering how I gave that away.

She put the steaming cups on the table and seated herself. "You've got that 'I'll-take-it-black' look or something," she told me. "Some guys do, some don't. Before I started my business, I waitressed for years," she explained. "I've got a knack for knowing."

"Really," I said, sipping some of the coffee and watching her do the same.

She smiled at me. "I live in a toilet, Mr.—"

"Virginiak."

"Virginiak—So, don't give me

that 'oh, what a nice place you've got here, Mercedes,' stuff, okay?"

"Okay."

She smiled again, sipped more coffee, then held out her hand in a "so-what-do-you-want-to-know" gesture.

"First, I should say that I'm sorry for your loss."

She shrugged slightly.

"According to the statement you gave to the police, the last time you saw your ex-husband was July first."

"That's right."

"At his house."

"Yes."

"What did you see him about?"

She sat back in her chair, folding her arms. "A financial matter," she said.

"Another loan?"

Her eyes became wary again.

I leaned forward and smiled. "Ms. Enriquez—my job is not like a policeman's. I only have to determine whether national security issues are involved. Colonel Husting, before he retired, was in possession of highly classified information, and I need to find out whether the manner of his death suggests that any sensitive material he previously possessed has been compromised."

She thought that over, then said, "Call me Mercedes, please."

"All right, Mercedes."

She smiled, then sighed. "Well, you see my problem, don't you?"

"Not really," I told her, sitting back in my chair. "According to Husting's financial statements, you have been issuing him large checks regularly over the past three years since your divorce."

She nodded. "They were loans. Allen had promised to repay."

"And how would he do that?"

"I have no idea," she replied easily, lighting a cigarette.

"Were these loans secured?"

"They were—unsecured personal loans," she said carefully. "He told me he needed the money."

"For what?"

She shrugged. "For—whatever he needed."

"Out of the goodness of your heart."

"I'm a generous woman, Mr. Virginiak."

"Seems a bit suspicious, though, wouldn't you say?"

She neither agreed nor disagreed.

A soft breeze had begun to blow, whispering through the eucalyptus leaves.

She held a hand out over the lanai railing to feel it. "*Agua santa para paraíso*," she told me.

"Holy water?" I said.

She smiled. "My mother used to tell me when this kind of rain fell it was holy water from heaven—and to go out in it and be blessed."

I nodded, had more of her very good coffee, then said, "The police think you were laundering drug money."

Her eyes frowned at me while she thought that through, while I vaguely wondered if Villareal would be unhappy about my telling her.

"You mean they think Allen was in the drug business?" she asked.

"Seems reasonable."

She frowned a little longer, then said, "More coffee?"

I told her no and watched her get up to get herself some.

Thinking I liked the woman although she wasn't telling me the truth and was probably up to her neck in some bad business. I liked the way she controlled herself—her “cool” as they say.

I felt pretty cool myself, in fact.

I walked to the kitchenette. “So, can you help me out, Mercedes?”

Her eyes smiled at me. “You mean you'd like me to confess to laundering drug money so that you can be sure Allen's military secrets are safe?”

“That's about it,” I had to admit.

She poured her second cup. “I think that whatever Allen was doing no classified material has been compromised. Does that help?”

It didn't, but she knew that.

“You could just trust me.”

I smiled at her.

“Is that so funny?”

I shrugged, “You tell me, Mercedes,” I said. “You're telling me you gave your ex-husband—a man who had a history of beating you up—nearly seven hundred fifty thousand dollars in unsecured personal loans over the past three years to support his expensive tastes, all out of the goodness of your generous heart, while you live in a toilet, and make excellent coffee—and I should *trust* you?” I wagged my head. “It's a little funny, I think.”

She said nothing.

“But you're not telling the truth,” I added. “So, it's not *that* funny.”

She only looked at me.

“I've been asking hard questions of people for a long time, Mercedes, and I know lies when I hear them.” I smiled. “I've a knack for knowing.”

She thought that over, nodded,

then dug a business card out of a purse that was on the kitchen counter and handed it to me. “This has my attorney's number on it.”

I took the card, thanked her for her time and the coffee, and left.

So much for seeing her alone.

Back in the car, I told Villareal what she'd had to say—or hadn't said, rather—then asked him to drive me back to my hotel, which he did and it was as quiet going as coming and that was fine with me.

In my mind I was already half-way home, having decided I'd wasted enough of my time and the army's and that I'd head back to Fort Lewis that night.

So we were both quiet as death until we arrived at my hotel and he'd parked, which is when he said, “A couple of years ago a retired naval commander and his wife were murdered in their house up in La Jolla.”

There was a serious, semi-irritated air about him now.

“He'd been in Naval Intelligence before he retired. Turned out it was some home-raiding gang of punks who did it, but you know what? No one from the navy investigated.”

“Well,” I said, opening the door and getting out. It was just starting to cloud up and looked like rain after all.

I looked back into the car. “We do things differently in the army.”

That wasn't entirely true, of course, but it was what I told him, and if he didn't like it he could sue me. In any case, I was in my pack-up and go-home state of mind, so I didn't give the policeman's suspi-

cions a second thought. I went up to my room, drafted something like a report, then headed down to the hotel bar.

Where I had a couple of doubles of Jack Daniel's—something the new me did from time to time—and quietly rehearsed what I would say to Chavez when I called.

I needed to rehearse because I just knew he'd give me some grief over finishing up so quickly, but there really was no point in staying any longer.

Not because I could claim definitively that no security interests had been compromised, but there was little probability of that, and there was really no other avenue for investigation except, perhaps, a trip down south, though I couldn't see much point in going.

But I knew he'd give me grief anyway because he'd been on my back for a couple of months—for no reason at all—and he'd have some harebrained reason for my staying unless I could anticipate him. So I had a couple of drinks, then a couple more, and rehearsed.

And a funny thing happened.

I began getting a little angry.

Maybe it was the liquor, because drinking was a new thing in my new life, but just thinking about Chavez and the things he'd probably say was getting me mad—and what was funny about it was that part of my new attitude was not caring enough to *get* angry.

I was Mr. Cool.

But there I was, sitting in the bar of the Hacienda Hotel, angrily muttering my end of a conversation with someone who wasn't there.

Until I began to get a bit too animated and started getting funny looks, so I left. Went out for a walk under clouding skies to practice my call to Chavez in private.

I had it down pretty well by the time Villareal's rain came, so I hustled back to the hotel—stopping at the bar for a final pick-me-up or two, then up to my room, where I placed the call.

I got Chavez at his quarters because he was home with the flu, and after giving him the highlights of my report-in-progress, I told him I was coming back.

"But, you just got there!" he complained.

I *knew* it, I thought.

"Villareal seems to know what he's talking about," I said. "Husting was probably involved in drug trafficking, and it's a high risk business."

He sighed some exasperation at me.

"I could probably get a flight back tonight."

"You could, huh?"

"There's nothing to do here, and I..."

"Baloney!" he said.

Damn, I thought.

"So what do you want me to do?"

I asked. "A day at the zoo? Husting wasn't selling secrets to the Chinese, okay? I'm just wasting time here."

"What I want you to do," he told me in a warning way, "is your *job*."

I sighed some exasperation back at him.

"You hear me?"

"I do my *job*, sir."

"You're just going through the motions."

Double-damn, I thought.

"You've been sleepwalking for months, and it's going to stop."

I said nothing.

"You hear me, *Mister Virginiak*?"

He sounded pretty irritated, but I was getting irritated again myself.

"Right," I said. "But I've heard this before, and it's crap."

"What did you say?" he asked as if unbelieving.

"I said, this is *crap*."

"*Damn* it, mister, you watch your mouth! I don't know what the hell's gotten into you," he told me, "but I've had it with this bad attitude of yours."

"Really."

"You're either going to snap the hell out of it," Chavez continued, "or it's time to put in your papers."

"Is it?"

"Damn right it is, and . . ."

"Okay," I told him.

"Okay, what?"

And now I *was* angry.

"I'll do my job."

"Good."

"I'll find out who killed Hustling, as if it makes any damn difference . . ."

"All right."

"I'll go down to Mexico and look under every rock," I went on. "I'll turn Mexico inside out, and I'll damn well find out who killed him."

"Fine."

"I'll find out who killed him, and then I'm gone, you understand *that*, sir?"

"Whatever you say."

"So you get those papers ready, okay? Because I've had it, too!"

"I'll get the first sergeant on it immediately."

"You do that, sir, you just . . ."

But he'd hung up.

Oh, *damn*!

I was really hot then. Drunk-angry. Furniture-kicking, door-slamm-ing, curse-muttering angry.

So angry that when I called down to the front desk to have them get my bill ready I was breathless. So angry I used my personal credit card instead of the army's when I checked out and rented a car an hour later.

In fact, I was angry all the way down to San Ysidro. Speed-driving, horn-honking, steering-wheel-pounding angry. All the way, over the border and through Tijuana. Angry at Chavez, angry with the army, angry with myself—and every other idiot driver on the road.

And still angry when I arrived in the tiny coastal village of Rosarita around eight P.M.

Where I saw the sidewalks choked with tourists, and it hit me that I had no reservations at any hotel.

A realization that, for some reason, chilled me down a little. Sobered me up a bit, maybe. Or perhaps it was the effort of having to think because the first two hotels I tried were full and the only responses I was getting to my requests for help from desk clerks were annoying shrugs.

In any case, by the time I'd found a cheap, non-tourist hotel, I was downright mellow.

Which is how I stayed after checking in and getting a small, unair-

conditioned room that overlooked a street of neon-lit bar fronts.

Where I spent most of the night watching geckos dart across the walls chasing mosquitoes and the overhead fan move dead hot air over me, and thinking.

About a lot of things but mostly my attitude.

Which was not "bad" as Chavez had said. I mean, how could it be when I had none? My attitude, my perspective, my emotional response mechanism was, in fact, missing in action.

I was attitude-zero, feeling-neutral. The alcohol-fueled anger spasm I'd gone through earlier was the first time in months I'd been angry. The first time I'd felt anything at all since . . . well, for quite a while.

Facing that and thinking it through, I decided I was probably headed toward, or in the grip of, depression. From what I knew of depression anyway, I seemed to show the symptoms—and I'd need to get up enough self-interest somehow to see someone about it unless I wanted to retire to some funny farm. If I didn't want to have to alcohol-inspire myself to life for the rest of my life, that's where I was headed, and I couldn't see any way I was going to get better on my own.

Sometime in the small hours of the night I went to sleep, dreamt of nothing I remembered later, and awoke—still in those small hours—bathed in a cold sweat. I was semi-hungover with a bad headache, but with a kind of clarity of thought that was so compelling I nearly laughed.

Everything was so transparent,

suddenly—and I knew just what to do.

And then I slept again, very well.

Getting up around eight, hungry enough to eat my shoes—I hadn't had a thing since the bad taco with Villareal the day before—I started my morning with a huge breakfast at a touristy place at the mall. Huevos rancheros, a chicken enchilada, toast, and coffee so strong it made my neck hairs stand up.

After which I considered making some calls. I knew people down here, and if Villareal's theory of Husting's murder and his source of income was correct, they would know, but I decided first to see the boat.

After getting directions from a clerk in a tiny smokeshop just off the mall, where I also splurged on a packet of Cuban cheroots that Villareal had put me in mind of and that I hadn't smoked in years, I drove down to the tiny harbor.

Among the rough-hulled working fishing boats that were moored along the several piers, the *Mariquita Linda* was easy to find, fifty feet of sleek white with polished teak and chrome fittings shining so brightly that they looked like bursts of white fire. It seemed to have wandered into a very bad neighborhood.

There was also a uniformed guard, I saw.

Two men in army uniforms were sitting in chairs under a makeshift canvas shade by the stern-deck ramp. If I wanted to get aboard for a look, I'd need some kind of plan.

I'd considered, of course, trying to go through channels, but that would have meant going through Chavez, with whom I was still a little angry, and I didn't want to do that. Besides, I knew how things worked down here. Going through channels might have meant weeks before getting permission, and even then it would be iffy.

I wanted aboard now, so I needed that plan. I put myself at the table of an outdoor cafe with a view of the piers, drank impossibly strong coffee, watched boats come and go, children playing soccer in the street, tourists strolling by—and tried to think of one.

But not a lot came to mind.

Which left me hoping for some lucky break.

An hour later I saw the guard changed at the boat, and an hour after that an officer came to check briefly on the two new men on duty. Around noon one of the guards, a paunchy corporal, went into a nearby grocery store and bought two cans of beer which he took back out to the pier and shared with the other guard.

And then around twelve thirty a little girl on an ancient, too-big bicycle with a large cooler tied to the back wobbled down the street and out on the pier. Out to where the guards were stationed. I watched them unload canisters of food and bottled beer from the cooler and eat their lunch while the girl waited.

It took them half an hour or so. Canisters repacked in the cooler, the little girl wobbled her way back off the pier.

She was about abreast of me in

the street when the chain of her bicycle unraveled and she took a spill, which was unlucky for her but might be a break for me.

She wasn't hurt, but she was teary-eyed when I helped her up. I rethreaded the chain, trying with no luck to get her to tell me her name. I was just finishing when one of the guards—this one a private and in very new-looking fatigues—appeared, spoke briefly to the girl, then said to me, "Thank you, señor."

"No problem," I told him.

"Muchas gracias," the little girl beamed.

The soldier and I watched her get back on her bike and pedal uncertainly away. "My cousin," he said. "Teresa."

I nodded, then looked at the young man, who couldn't have been more than nineteen. "She's a very pretty girl."

He shrugged.

"Smoke?" I said, offering him one of the cheroots. Which he took, with another thank you. "Been in the army long?"

"Not so long," he told me. "It's my national service, you know? I'm a student at the technical school in Ensenada."

"Really."

"Yes."

"Your English is very good."

"Thank you, señor."

We smoked quietly together for a moment, then I waved a hand toward the *Mariquita Linda*. "That's a very nice boat you're guarding."

"S'okay," he replied.

"I've always wanted a boat like that," I lied. "Must have a big engine."

He shrugged. "I know nothing about engines, señor."

I nodded. "Actually," I said, "I'd like to take a look at it."

He looked sorrowful. "It is forbidden."

"Oh?"

"I'm sorry, señor," he explained with regret. "We have orders to allow no one aboard."

"I understand," I told him. "I just wanted to take a look, but if it's not permitted—" I shrugged—"so be it."

"Perhaps, señor," he continued, "when Capitán Diaz returns, you could speak with him."

I considered that, then nodded. "Perhaps I will."

"But, he will not be back for several hours."

"Ah."

The young soldier gave me a knowing look. "He has a friend in the village."

"I see," I said with the same knowing look.

He shrugged the shrug of a nineteen-year-old man of the world.

I smiled at him. "Is the captain a betting man, do you know?"

"Señor?"

I tossed my cheroot away. "I came to Rosarita to gamble."

The young man laughed. "There are no casinos in Rosarita, señor."

"I know," I agreed. "I was misinformed, but . . . perhaps the captain would like to make a bet with me."

He looked puzzled.

"A small bet," I said.

His puzzled look sharpened.

"Just for fun," I told him.

He gave me a curious squint. "What kind of bet, señor?"

"Oh, not much. Maybe—five hundred pesos?"

The young man's face grew wary.

"Do you think he might be interested?" I asked.

He thought that over. "It's possible," he replied carefully. "What is the bet, señor?"

"Well," I said with a laugh, "you may think it foolish."

He waited.

"The one who told me of the gambling in Rosarita?" I laughed again. "He also told me that this boat you are so carefully guarding is carrying the Bells of Rosarita."

"The what?"

I had to bite my tongue hard to keep from laughing at the utterly perplexed look on his face. "The Bells of Rosarita," I repeated.

He blinked and shook his head.

"That boat," I added, "was once owned by Roy Rogers himself."

"Roy Rogers?"

"Yes," I said with certainty.

"There are no bells on that boat, señor."

"In that case, if I were to bet that the bells *were* there, the captain would win his five hundred pesos very easily."

After a second or so the young man's look grew shrewd.

"Unless," I added, looking now at his nametag, "it is yourself who likes to gamble, Private Hernandez."

After another few seconds he got it.

Hernandez turned out to be a betting man after all, so we made our "bet," and after he'd somehow managed to shoo the other guard away, he got me aboard the yacht

to confirm the absence of the Bells of Rosarita.

"It will take a little time," I told him.

"No more than an hour, señor."

"That's perfect," I assured him, pulling on plastic gloves.

I began in the stern, lifting seat cushions, looking in corners, peering in nooks, exploring crannies, giving the craft a good going-over. The *Mariquita Linda* might or might not have been a steal at two hundred thousand dollars, but she was a very nice looking thing and, aside from a long, shallow gash low on the portside bow, seemed in perfect condition.

In the small wheelhouse the control panel, which bore radar and sonar screens, looked as if it were NASA-designed.

"Was it towed here?" I asked Hernandez as I opened cabinets, "or did it come under its own power?"

"The engines run," he told me, "but I do not want to bet."

I laughed and went on with my search. Looking for what, I wasn't sure, but by the time I'd stepped down into the cool, dim interior of the salon I hadn't found it.

"What are you looking for, señor?"

"Well," I said, gazing around, "not bells."

Paneled in dark wood with a round oak table in the center and assorted leather chairs strewn around, the room had a compact cooking area in one corner and a large-screen TV in another.

"You are the police?" Hernandez asked.

"Not really," I told him, opening

a port curtain, which did not help the lighting situation very much.

"The owner of this boat was murdered, yes?"

"Not the owner, but the last man to take her out was murdered, yes."

"There is blood over there," he said.

I looked where he pointed, then stepped over and squatted down for a closer look, flicking on my penlight as I did so.

"That's blood all right," I said, casting the light around the floor. "Was a weapon found?"

"Not that I saw," he told me. "The cabins are behind you."

"Uh-huh."

"Nothing there, though."

"Mmmhmm."

"Señor?"

The light of my flash had caused a glint off something in a narrow space between the sink and the small stove, but I ignored it, got up, and looked through both of the identical forward cabins, saying, "A forensic team was supposed to come from Mexico City."

"Señor?"

I explained.

"No one has come to make such an examination."

"I see," I said, poking under things and around things, opening drawers and cabinets.

"Do you know the PGR, señor?"

The Procuraduría General de la República—the Mexican attorney general's office. "I know the PGR," I replied.

"They are fighting with the army," he explained. "They think the boat is theirs, and no one examines the boat until it is decided."

I went back into the salon. "Do you think this boat was used by the *trafficantes*?"

He shrugged.

"Was any contraband discovered?"

"No, but . . ." In the dim light, he gave me a knowing look. "I think it will be."

"Oh?"

"If it is, the boat becomes the property of whoever investigates, señor."

"Ah."

"Finished, señor?"

"No bells," I said.

"I am sorry, señor."

I got out another cheroot and started to fire it up but dropped my lighter and had to squat down and reach between the sink and stove to retrieve it—and I got it.

Stood up again, lit my little cigar, sighed smoke, then handed the young man his five hundred peso note. "I'm just not very lucky, I guess."

Which was hardly the case that day although I didn't know yet how lucky.

On the way back to my hotel I examined what I'd taken from the boat, which was a key chain with several keys, a car-lock beeper, and a rabbit's foot dangling from a small brass horseshoe. Once in my room, using some reading glasses I carry, I could make out the words GOLDEN HORSESHOE B&G imprinted along the curved edge of the tiny horseshoe.

It rang a bell at the back of my mind but only very softly, so I put the keys aside and made the calls I'd put off making earlier. . . .

To a variety of people I knew and some I did not: Mexican and U.S. nationals, officials and unofficials, all of whom were in one way or another connected with drug interdiction in the republic, and by the end of that afternoon I'd convinced myself that Villareal was probably mistaken in his assumption.

Mistaken, not necessarily that Husting hadn't been in the drug business but that if he had been, he had to have been new to it; and mistaken in his assumption that the murder had been related to some deal gone "wrong."

It was not their "style" one ex-DEA agent in Sonora told me of the *trafficantes*. "They would've taken the damn boat, for one thing," he said, "and besides, anyone good enough to have made that much money in the last three years would be a name everyone knew."

An opinion shared by most of those with whom I spoke that afternoon, leaving me at dusk with the conviction that turning Mexico inside out wouldn't help get me closer to the truth of Husting's murder.

So after a long dinner and a solid night's sleep I checked out of the hotel and drove back to San Diego the next morning.

Straight out to Coronado Island and the home of Allen Husting because it seemed the logical place to go.

I beeped his parked Porsche with the keychain's beeper, with no response—though the battery could be dead or the security system of

the car disconnected—and none of the keys worked on his house either, though in itself that meant little as well.

It had crossed my mind, of course, that the keys might belong to the owner of the boat, whoever that was, might have lain where I'd found them for ages, and might have nothing whatever to do with Husting's death—but I had a strong hunch they belonged to Husting and were somehow a clue.

If they weren't, my trip to Mexico would have been for nothing because that was all I'd come away with.

And I felt lucky. I felt on a roll.

So I called Information, asking for the listing of the Golden Horseshoe Bar & Grill.

It turned out to be not far from Coronado, on the road south of San Diego that Villareal and I had driven past the day before on the way to National City. That explained the bell the name had rung in my head earlier.

Small, seedy-looking, in a semi-depressed manufacturing area, the bar was open but just barely when I arrived. A fat, aproned fellow behind the bar was watching golf on TV, while a just-as-fat woman was taking chairs off tables and wiping them down.

"Grill's not open yet," the fat man said as I took a seat at the bar.

"I'll just have a Lone Star," I told him. Which he gave me, along with a tiny bowl of very salty peanuts.

I had some, then took out the key chain, put them on the bar, and said, "I found these keys today."

The man glanced at them, then

leaned closer, frowned, and snorted. "Haven't seen one of those in years," he told me, pointing to the horseshoe. "Used to give them away to regulars, you know? A promotional thing."

I pointed to the rabbit's foot. "You wouldn't know who this belonged to, would you?"

He shook his head slowly. "No," he replied just as slowly. He looked over at the fat woman. "Hey, Luisa, take a look at this."

The woman waddled over and took the keys from him, brought them up close to her eyes, and said, "Panama Pete."

"Oh yeah?"

"I think so," she said and looked at me with wide eyes. "Where you get thees?"

"I found them," I told her. "Who's Panama Pete?"

"I'll be damned," the bartender said, taking the keys back from the woman.

"Tha's no rabbit foot, you know," the woman said. "Ees chinchilla."

"You sure it was his?" the fat man asked.

"Chur I am," she protested. "Pete tol me about thees chinchilla. Ess more lucky than rabbit."

"I'll be damned," the fat man said again. "Panama Pete." He looked at me. "Name was really . . . Xavier something . . ."

"Hermano," Luisa provided.

"Xavier Hermano, that's it," the bartender agreed. "Was called Panama Pete 'cause he wore one of those old-time hats, y'know?" He snorted. "I dunno where we got the Pete, though."

"Where could I find him?" I asked.

"Oh, he's been dead . . . three years, Luisa?"

"Bout dat."

"I see," I said.

"Hit and run," the man told me. "Happened right after closing one night, just up the highway about a mile."

"Really."

He shook his head. "Wouldn't have felt a thing, though—believe me," he said. "Guy was a drinker, you know? Drank his Social Security check the first week of every month."

"Did he live around here?"

"Yeah, in doorways, cars, whatever was unlocked." He laughed shortly. "Didn't have a real major need for a key chain, but—" he shrugged—"he was a regular, you know?"

"Did he have any friends or relatives you know of?"

"Not that I know of," he said, handing back the keys. "Where'd you find 'em?"

"Down south."

The fat man nodded. "They never got the guy. The one who ran him down."

"Oh?"

He nodded again. "Another Lone Star?"

I passed on it, thanked him and Luisa, then went back to my hotel and had a good steak dinner and then a long think-walk up through Old Town, wondering if my lucky roll had come to an end.

Not that I didn't have ideas, of course, but what I wanted—what I'd decided the small hours of that early morning—was to do justice.

I wanted certainty and clarity

and understanding, and then to do justice. I needed the feeling of having made this business come out justly, and for that I needed to know more. The dead-end to which Panama Pete had come seemed to put me at one as well.

I decided, however, to play the hand out, so back in my room I called Villareal, told him what I wanted, avoided his questions, and spent the next hour or so sitting on the lanai smoking my last cheroot and watching a red-streaked sunset diminish into night.

Until he got back to me.

"Hermano, Xavier Victor," he told me when he called a little before six P.M. "Body was found by a CHP unit in a gully that runs along Route 8 on 3/9/95. Probable hit and run; he was dead at the scene . . . Let's see. No arrest ever made . . . the guy—Hermano—had a sheet. Priors for assault, burglary, trespass . . . He was apparently indigent. Had no place of residence. No next-of-kin. Body was unclaimed."

"I see." I felt a bit let down.

"This is interesting," he continued. "His body was transported to the FairHaven Mortuary for funeral services."

"Why is that interesting?"

"Well, cremation of unclaimed remains is usually done by the county, and that means cheaply. The M.E.'s facility here in San Diego handles it. FairHaven, though, is definitely death on the upscale."

"Expensive."

"Very," he assured me.

"But the body was unclaimed?"

"That's what it says. So what is all this, anyway?"

"Probably nothing."

"Uh-huh."

And although I felt I owed him—an apology and an explanation—I didn't want to involve him yet, so I put him off. Told him I'd buy him breakfast in the morning and tell him what I knew then.

Or find another way to put him off because I needed to do this myself. I needed to make this personal, and there was a sense of urgency about it.

Despite the lateness of the day, I spent the next hour on the phone with various employees of the Fair-Haven Mortuary.

Some seemed to think that revealing the information I was after would jeopardize the security of the free world. Some insisted I call back in the morning or wait for a return call, but I stayed on the phone and persisted and eventually managed to get what I wanted—and, it surprised me.

Surprised me enough that I just sat for another hour trying to sort it out because I'd thought the end of the case was going one way but now it went another and needed more thinking over.

While rethinking things I looked over the key chain again. Rather idly but this time examining the seven keys more closely and noticing, now, one in particular. It was medium-sized and made of tarnished brass, and it had, barely visible, BUSINESS CTR. stamped along the curved edge with the number 601 imprinted on the face.

On a quick hunch I tried the yellow pages and came up empty, but the directory I had provided listings for San Diego only. I had another hunch and decided I wasn't going to sleep on it.

So I went out and drove south again to National City.

I got there around nine o'clock and tooled around the dark, mostly empty streets of downtown for not very long before finding the building, the National City Business Center—a squat, ugly, six-story, dirty brick thing with a small parking lot at the side.

I parked beside the only other car present, a two-, maybe three-year-old Honda, took out the key case, pressed the beeper, and heard the driver's side door unlock itself.

I felt back on my roll.

The gated entrance to the building adjacent to the parking lot had a card/keypad device that defeated me, of course, but around in front the large glass double doors were open. I entered and checked the building directory.

The elevator required a key. I had it and used it and rode up to the sixth floor. Suite 601 was the first door I came to. After a second or so of second thoughts, because I had no business doing what I was doing, I tried the key; it opened the door.

Opened it onto a semi-dark interior. Simultaneously I saw a light and heard a voice I knew say, "Hello?"

It did not, of course, surprise me, nor, in a way, did it surprise her. I suppose, in her own mind, the sheer enormity of what she'd done made

being found out inevitable, so, although she hadn't exactly been waiting for me, I'd been expected nonetheless.

Anyway, she talked.

"Allen," she said, "could be a very charming man." She lit a cigarette, sat forward in her chair, and toyed with a glass ashtray on her desk. "I suppose I should have been more careful, but I was thirty-five years old five years ago when I met him, and I'd never been married—except to my business. A part of me felt as though being married was something I needed to do." She smiled ruefully. "So I did."

I nodded.

We were by then sitting in the tiny, shabby, inner office of the Speedy-G's CEO, and I'd not really had to explain anything of what I knew or guessed to get her to talk. I'd said hardly anything at all except where I found her keys and what I knew about Xavier Hermano, but that had been enough to puncture the dam of her guilt because she was ready to confess.

Anxious to do so, in fact.

So, I listened.

"I won't bore you with the details of how wrong things went with Allen and me," Mercedes Enriquez said, "but they did, and very quickly—and I began drinking."

Her brow wrinkled with memory. "One night three years ago I'd been to a party in Long Beach and had too much to drink and on the way home, somewhere along 495, I hit a man who'd been walking in the road." She shrugged. "I killed him."

"Panama Pete," I said.

She frowned at me.

"His street name," I told her.

"Oh," she said. "I didn't know."

"Did you stop?"

"Of course."

"But you didn't report it."

She dropped her head. "It was late," she said in a way that was neither self-excusing nor guilt-ridden. "There was no other traffic. No witnesses. The man was dead, and I was drunk."

"All right," I said after a moment.

"So, what *did* you do?"

"I called Allen," she said. "I didn't know what else to do. I needed someone to take charge and Allen was a very take-charge kind of man." She stubbed out one cigarette and lit another. "I waited in the car until he came, and that was the longest thirty minutes of my life."

"And what did Allen do?" I asked.

"He—examined the man," she said. "He was wearing several layers of clothing, hadn't bathed in years, it seemed, and was obviously a homeless person. He had no I.D. except for a MediCal card. Had no money, no watch, nothing except an empty key chain with a rabbit's foot on it."

"Chinchilla," I told her.

"Oh?"

"What did you do then?"

She shrugged. "We left. My car was a little dinged in front, but Allen handled that and we never spoke of it again." She leaned forward and with honest emphasis said, "Don't think I minimize what I did because of whom I killed, Mr. Virginiak. Not a day has gone by since that night that I haven't

thought of that poor man and what I did. I kept that key chain to remind me, but . . .” She held out a hand for understanding. “I have a life, too.”

“You paid for his funeral,” I told her.

“Yes,” she agreed with mild surprise. “How did you know . . .”

“It’s unimportant,” I said. “Tell me about Hustung.”

She nodded.

“A year later Allen and I separated and divorced, and it was during the divorce negotiations that Allen first suggested that I pay him to keep quiet about what I’d done.” She shook her head. “I should never have agreed, I know. In fact, I first told him I wouldn’t, and I consulted an attorney about coming forward about the hit and run, but . . .” She sighed and looked a bit self-amazed. “This will sound ridiculous to you.”

“Go on.”

“I’d just been named Business Person of the Year for Southern California, and—by then—I was on the national board of MADD, which is . . .”

“Mothers Against Drunk Driving,” I said.

“Yes, so . . .” She shook her head. “But the shame wasn’t that simple.” She frowned, looking for the words to explain. “My parents were migrant farmworkers, Mr. Virginiak. They both worked themselves to death in their forties, but they made a stable life for their children.” She smiled slightly. “I’m very proud of them and the hard lives they lived for me and my sisters. The bottom line, Mr. Virginiak, is that

I couldn’t have stood the shame it would have brought on myself or their name—so I paid.”

“I see,” I said.

“He’d asked for a million dollars, and he understood it would have to be paid in increments so my business wouldn’t suffer, but then—” She suddenly looked unwell. “Allen called me—that day . . .”

“The first,” I said.

“Yes,” she agreed. “July first. He called and—*ordered* me down to the marina, and said to bring my checkbook.” Her lip curled with sudden dislike. “He was so smug, so arrogant—so . . .” She closed her eyes, shook her head, and sighed the anger away. “I met Allen that morning, at the boat he wanted to buy. He wanted two hundred fifty thousand—the amount I still owed him of the million he’d asked for—but I told him it was too much, and that was the truth. I couldn’t have made payroll this month if I’d paid him, but he was insistent. He told me the boat was a bargain and that he wouldn’t ask again, but I said no again, and he became angry.”

“What happened?”

Her eyes filled suddenly. “You have no idea, Mr. Virginiak, what it’s like to be so in the control of another. So managed. So—helpless.”

I said nothing because I didn’t.

She dried her eyes. “He took the boat out, with me still aboard, and once we were at sea, he . . .” She shook her head. “He’d been drinking, before and after we went out on that stupid boat, and the more Allen drank, the meaner he got. By the time we’d been out an hour or so, he was about as mean as he

gets." She lit her third cigarette. "We passed the floating carcass of a killer whale, and Allen brought us up alongside to watch the sharks feeding on it. He asked me if I'd like to go for a swim."

I stayed silent.

"Then," she told me in a hard voice, "he tried to rape me. The last few times he'd ordered me to his house to make a payment he'd gotten—physical with me. Nothing as bad as when we'd been married but enough to scare me, and I'd bought a gun. When he attacked me on the boat . . ." She held up a hand. "I won't make the excuse, Mr. Virginiak, that I thought my life was in danger. I was his cash-machine, and I knew I would survive whatever he did with me, but . . ." Her eyes glittered with sudden remembered anger. "A final line was crossed that morning—Allen went too far."

I nodded.

"I took out my gun and started shooting at his smirking, arrogant face—and I do not regret killing him."

"I see."

"I put his body over the side and watched the sharks drag him down, and I felt like . . ." She sat back in her chair and looked into the space above my head. "Before I shot Allen, I felt empty," she explained. "Being in his control all those years—he'd emptied me of myself, and—I'd felt flat." She looked back down at me and semi-smiled. "Killing that sonofabitch was a kind of reclamation of myself, and I do not regret it."

She laughed shortly. "I nearly

capsized the boat trying to get back, but I managed to bring it aground." She stubbed out her cigarette, sat back again, crossed her arms and said, "End of story, Mr. Virginiak."

"Okay."

"And you know what," she added. "I'm not ashamed any more. I'm sorry for what I did to that man on the highway, and I was wrong, but—" she shook her head—"I'm not ashamed any more. Do you understand that?"

"I think so," I told her.

She nodded. "Should we call the police now, or . . ."

"My father died early this year," I said, feeling my chest suddenly tighten. "I was out of the country at the time."

"I'm sorry," she said.

I nodded. "My mother died many years ago, and my father lived alone on his farm in upstate New York." I sighed at the tightness and felt a bit breathless. "One morning last March he . . . fell from a tractor . . . broke his back and froze to death."

"Oh . . ."

"We hadn't been very close," I told her quickly. "We got along all right, but we weren't close—not since my mother passed away, but I'd always planned to change that. You know, give him a call, get together with him—do something." I shook my head. "I never did."

She nodded with sympathy and waited.

I took a moment to find the words.

"The thing is, I haven't really grieved," I said finally. "All I've done is push grief away. Fought it off every time it showed its face—

and I'm very good at that. Too good because—" I shrugged "—I gave myself a problem. An attitude problem but . . ." I smiled. "My boss thinks it's a bad attitude, but it's worse than that."

"It's having no attitude," she said.

"Yes."

She nodded.

"Yes," I said, again, "like you, I'd emptied myself of myself. I felt flat."

"I understand," she told me.

"And I couldn't find a way back until this case."

She frowned at that.

"Not that I started out really caring about anything," I explained. "Not about Husting, not about doing my job, nothing, but then—" I smiled at the memory "—I got angry the other day."

"At what?"

I shook my head.

"The point is, I hadn't got angry at anything in months, and when I realized that, I knew I had to do something—had to start caring

about things again or I'd end up—I don't know what."

She nodded.

"Anyway," I said, "I decided to care about this case. Decided I wanted to do justice—for Husting, I thought. I believed if I could find out what happened, and do justice I'd—I don't know—reclaim myself somehow."

She said nothing.

"And—maybe I have," I added.

She stayed quiet.

And I'd finished talking myself.

So I stood up, placed the key chain on her desk in front of her, and said, "You shouldn't leave these lying around just anywhere, Ms. Enriquez. You never know who might pick them up."

And then I left. Walked out of the tiny office, out of the building, and into the warm night, into a fine, cool rain—*agua santa para paraiso*—that seemed to bless everything.

And then I finally cried for my father.

UNSOLVED

Robert Kesling

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the June issue.

Treasury Agent Tuttle seldom smiled. But today he grinned broadly as he offered a seat in his office to the owlish little man from the Syndicate. "As I understand it, Mr. Sangria," he began, "you are proposing to exchange information on Syndicate operations for guarantee of immunity—"

"And protection. And relocation," added Sammy Sangria quickly.

"I think we can strike a deal, sir—if your information is accurate."

"Oh, it is, it is."

"Just why are you doing this, if I may inquire?"

Sangria turned his eyes downward. "Well, you see," he said, leaning forward, "I am—or was—the Syndicate's bookkeeper. There was a little misunderstanding about certain funds—"

"You mean you had sticky fingers?"

"Well . . . er . . . some see it that way."

"Go ahead. Let's hear this important information."

"The Syndicate sells franchises in Chicago, Detroit, Miami, New York, and San Francisco. They have franchises for prostitution, extortion, gambling, marijuana, and cocaine in each of these cities."

"Franchises? They sell *franchises*?" This was news to Tuttle.

"Yes, payable monthly. Marijuana costs \$5,000; extortion \$10,000; prostitution \$15,000; gambling \$20,000; and cocaine \$25,000. There's a franchise for each of these enterprises—I think you would call them rackets—in each of the cities I mentioned."

"Who holds these so-called 'franchises'?"

"Five lieutenants—kingpins is the common term. Each holds one of each kind of franchise, and—"

"You mean that one kingpin has a different franchise in each city?"

"That's the way it is, sir. The Syndicate collects a total of \$75,000 per month from each lieutenant. They have 'diversified,' I believe is the description. Actually, it's done with a view to financial investment—having something to fall back on in case one of their operations is closed down due to unforeseen circumstances. As added protection, each of the five lives in a different city from any of the franchises. They live in Kansas City, Los Angeles, Mobile, New Orleans, and Omaha."

Tuttle poised his pen over his notepad. "Go on," he said.

(1) "I'd rather not mention all the facts," said Sangria. "Just enough to indicate the holders and their franchises. To begin, their first names are Alfie, Benny, Carlo, Danny, and Eddie, and their last names are Fanchetti, Giordano, Harbino, Ignacio, and Jacoby, in some order. Alfie, Carlo, and Benny (who doesn't live in New Orleans) include Mr. Fanchetti, Mr. Giordano, and Mr. Jacoby. One of them lives in Kansas City. Neither Alfie nor Benny lives in Mobile. Eddie (who doesn't have the marijuana franchise in San Francisco) doesn't live in Omaha.

(2) "Mr. Harbino, Mr. Jacoby, and Mr. Ignacio (who isn't Danny) include the three living in Los Angeles, Omaha, and Kansas City. Alfie doesn't live in Kansas City. Mr. Fanchetti doesn't live in New Orleans.

(3) "Benny (whose franchise in Detroit costs less than does Mr. Giordano's in that city) holds the franchise in New York that costs more than \$5,000 less than does Mr. Ignacio's in that city.

(4) "In New York, Carlo's franchise costs more than Alfie's. In Miami, Carlo's franchise costs exactly \$5,000 more than Mr. Jacoby's.

(5) "Alfie's franchise in Miami costs exactly \$5,000 more than Benny's franchise in San Francisco."

"Could you be a little more specific?" requested Agent Tuttle.

(6) "Well," replied Sangria, squirming nervously in his seat, "Danny has the marijuana franchise in New York, Alfie has the extortion franchise in San Francisco, Eddie the cocaine franchise in Detroit—"

"That's quite enough," interrupted Tuttle. "Now I know the full names of the five kingpins and where to find each of them—as well as who controls each racket in each city. I'm particularly interested in shutting down the Syndicate's operations in Miami."

"Then it's a deal?" asked Sammy Sangria anxiously.

"It's a deal!"

Who controls each of the rackets in Miami?

See page 140 for the solution to the April puzzle.

FICTION

EINSTEIN'S DOG

Dan A. Sproul

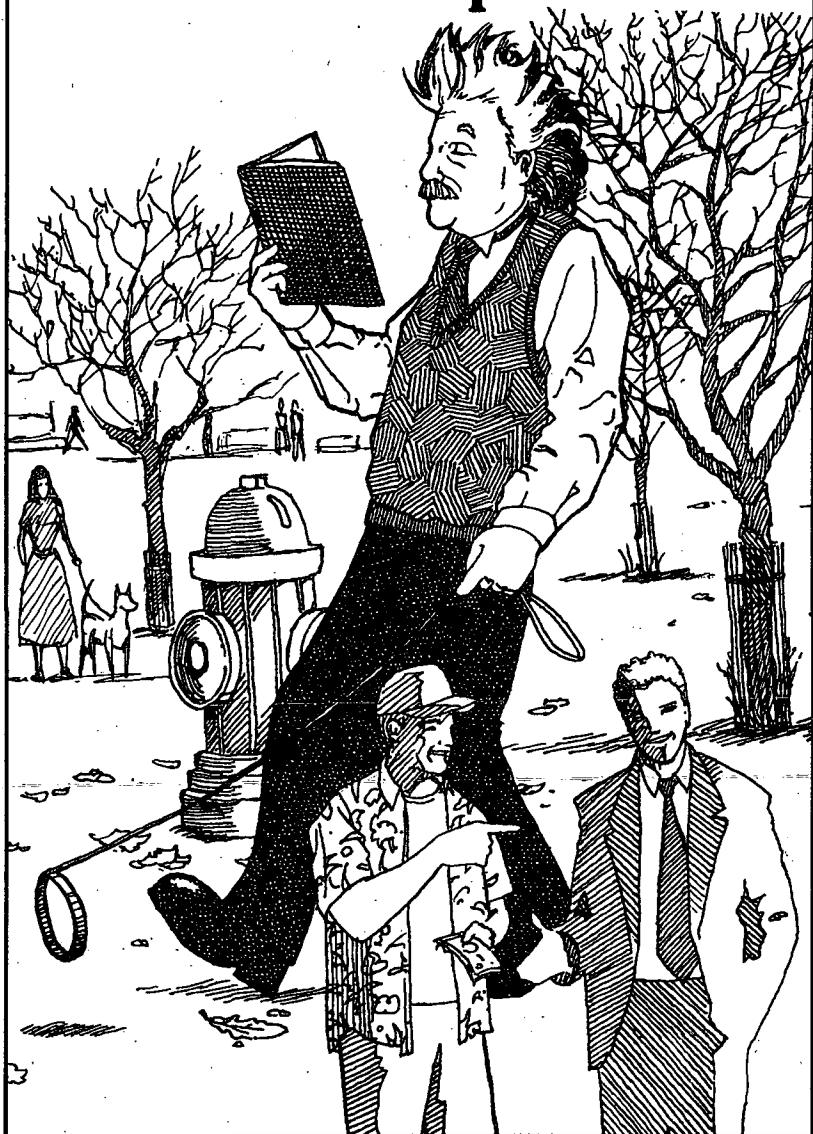


Illustration by Bill Kalpakoglou

Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine 5/00

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If I hadn't scored on the third race trifecta at Calder, I wouldn't have been able to pay my phone bill. If I hadn't paid my phone bill, she wouldn't have been able to call up and hire me. If she hadn't hired me, I would have missed the gravy train. She would have sent Chatsworth Roland McDermott to some other two-bit agency. Don't tell me you can't be walking around lucky and not know it.

Perhaps I misspoke when I put my highly successful but small agency into the two-bit category. Then again, what would *you* call a one-man detective agency—an agency where the owner and sole operative sleeps on a cot in his office under a big blowup photograph of Seattle Slew romping off to a daylight win in the Preakness Stakes at Pimlico? Okay, so it is a two-bit agency. The name is Standard Investigations. I'm Joe Standard.

Matilda McDermott Jacobs II maintained an estate in Pembroke Pines just north of Miami. It covered many acres. I had to shout my name into a speaker to clear the imposing main gates. It was at this point that I stopped wondering if Mrs. Matilda McDermott Jacobs II was loaded. Let's face it, you got to figure that anybody tossing about extraneous names is either abundantly funded or running a con. But those big iron gates with two-way communication are always a dead giveaway.

It was a long trip up the winding driveway. I hammered on the door before I noticed the doorbell. Then I saw what I came to discover was my very first actual, living, in-the-

flesh, on-the-job butler. He was a short, pudgy little fellow.

"Please enter," he said, guiding me in with both white-gloved hands. The joint was the size of Dracula's castle, but much cleaner. "I will tell madam you are here." He seemed annoyed that I didn't have a hat or coat or something to hand over to him.

Matilda was lithe. It made her look taller than she really was. At forty-five or thereabouts, she was still interesting to look at.

"It was so good of you to come all the way out here," she gushed at me once the butler turned loose of me in the doorway. "Wallace," she said, turning to the butler. "Would you be good enough to have Judy bring coffee for Mr. Standard." She motioned to a small, spindly looking lounge behind a glass coffee table. "Please make yourself comfortable, Mr. Standard."

Wallace bowed before departing and said, "Thank you, madam." I entertained the idea that Matilda was probably even more loaded than I first surmised.

"Matthew Armstrong recommended you," she said after Wallace shut the double doors. "I believe you did some work for one of his trainers."

Matthew Armstrong was a big-time breeder of thoroughbreds. He had breeding farms in Ocala and Paris, Kentucky, as well as racing stables at several of the major tracks. Ken Archer was one of his trainers. I was able to locate Ken's wife when she ran off with two of Armstrong's horses, but that's another story. I revisited my estimate

of Matilda's net worth. If she was hobnobbing with Armstrong and company, she had to be in a category that wouldn't be jammed up with mere millionaires.

"Would you like to tell me about the case?" I prompted, deciding on some action before greed dominated every fiber of my being.

"Well, it's not a case, really," she began. "I have a son—Chatsworth. He was to complete his doctoral work at Harvard in the fall." She hesitated. "This is so difficult to tell."

"Take all the time you need," I offered. It was my subtle attempt at graciousness.

Silently the double doors opened, and Wallace appeared. Behind him came, I could only assume, Judy with the coffee on a tray.

Matilda began again as we sipped from our cups. "Chatsworth has decided that he wants to take a sabbatical from his studies. He wants to learn to become a private investigator."

"This isn't some kind of joke, is it?" I asked.

"I assure you, I'm perfectly serious."

"Why in the world . . ."

"I know," she said. "It's perfectly silly. But he is an extremely intelligent boy with a photographic memory. He insists that it is something he must do. I promised to let him try it, at least until he is to return to school in the fall."

"Where is he now?" I asked.

"I sent him out for the evening. I thought you and I should have a talk beforehand. I thought if I turned him over to your care for a while perhaps you could dissuade

him from pursuing this foolishness. I mean, once he understands what the work involves . . ."

She offered me three thousand a week tuition to teach Chatsworth to hate being a private eye. I don't think it gets any better than this.

Chatsworth Roland McDermott was not what I expected. He was young, but not as young as I'd pictured: maybe twenty-four or five—heightwise, an inch shorter than I, which put him at about six one. He had the same light hair and blue eyes as his mother. One might expect that a genius of Chatsworth Roland McDermott's station in life, working on a doctorate from Harvard, would be a superior, strutting, arrogant intellectual, an all-round dedicated wiseass. Nothing could be further from the truth.

"Mr. Standard, sir. I'm Rollie McDermott. . . . I believe you spoke to my mother concerning some extracurricular work I would be doing in your agency. I want you to realize that I appreciate your allowing me to work with you."

I put down my pencil and closed the *Racing Form* on my desk with which I had been diligently involved. "Come on in," I said and motioned him to a seat in my lone client chair. "The first thing is, you don't have to call me sir. My name is Joe. The second thing is, you need to lose the name Rollie—I like McDermott, you can get your teeth into a name like McDermott."

"Why would that make a difference?" McDermott asked.

"Everything makes a difference in this business," I explained. "Suppose you're a bail bondsman and

you hire me to find somebody who skipped out on a bail bond. Which would you prefer to hear: 'I'll put my operative Rollie on it,' or 'I'll put McDermott on the case right away?'"

"I see," said McDermott. "The way you put it, there does appear to be a subtle but distinct advantage to the name McDermott because first names indicate a casual relationship that could be interpreted to reflect a cavalier attitude, while the use of a last name has the connotation of no-nonsense business."

"Ahh . . . yeah, I guess you could put it that way."

I watched McDermott take a small notepad from his pocket. "Why are you taking notes?" I asked. "I thought you had a photogenic memory."

"That's photographic memory—but yes, sir . . . I mean, yes. I take notes. I have to read it first. Once I do, I never forget."

"You remember everything you have ever read?" I asked with a trace of skepticism.

"Everything." McDermott confirmed. He put the notepad in his back pocket. "Ah . . . when do you issue me a gun?"

"You don't need to carry a gun. It'll get you in trouble."

"You don't have a gun?" He sounded seriously disappointed. I reminded myself that I needed to keep him around at least a week to collect the three grand.

"I didn't say I didn't have one. I have one. I just don't tote it around with me unless I plan on shooting somebody."

He nodded his head. "Oh, I see.

Okay, what cases are you working on now, Joe?"

I explained to him that I was currently between cases. And questioned him again about his photographic memory.

"You really remember everything you read?"

He nodded. "Would you like me to prove it?"

"Yeah, I'd like to see that."

A small bookcase resides at the head of my cot against the wall. McDermott sat on the cot and studied the titles. "You have a lot of horseracing books," he observed. He noticed several books on Winston Churchill, and a couple written by Churchill. "You're interested in Churchill?"

"I think Churchill was the greatest man who ever lived," I told him flat out, then added, "He thought so too."

He pulled a book from the shelf. "I've read this book," he said and handed it to me. "Select a page."

The book was Perkins' *The P.I. Bible: Case Studies in Private Detection*. I began to turn the pages. "What page?" I asked.

"You choose."

"Okay, page 193."

"Where do you want me to start?" McDermott asked.

I hastily read down through the page. "How 'bout at the bottom where it says in capital letters JAMES THE BAILJUMPER."

McDermott closed his eyes and soon began to speak. "In this particular case, the suspect, who I'll call James, had jumped a hundred thousand dollar bond on a burglary indictment. There were four in the

group. Their MO was to steal a vehicle, smash it back-end first into a retail store with glass doors—run inside, grab expensive merchandise, load it into the vehicle, and run. I thought it likely that James would join his old group to go on a job to acquire some getaway money.

“I staked out one of James’ accomplices, who I’ll call Kenny. Kenny was out on bail awaiting trial. The first night on stakeout, I watched Kenny heist a Ford half ton truck and followed him to a spot downtown. He met with James and two others of their gang and proceeded to an auto parts store just at the edge of town where they smashed the back of the pickup into the door and commenced to load up. I would have stopped them before they smashed the store front but, by a stroke of good fortune, the Ford truck they stole belonged to my ex-wife’s boyfriend. So, I waited until they smashed the truck up before I shot James twice in the leg attempting to get away on foot.”

“Is that enough, sir, I mean Joe?”

I looked up after reading along. He’d got it right—word for word.

“Damn, McDermott, I’m impressed. How do you do that?”

McDermott shrugged. “I don’t know. I just do it.” He pulled up the window shade behind the desk and took a peek out at the row of garbage cans across the alley behind the Surfer Bar and Grill. “You said you don’t have any cases right now, so what do you do?”

I explained that during lulls in the detective business I studied *The Racing Form*. Each race in the *Form*, I explained, was a mystery

waiting to be solved. All the facts, all past performances—everything needed to deduce the logical winner is laid out right before your eyes. You need only study the facts, weigh the variables, and make the correct selection to solve the mystery. I finished up by saying, “Selecting winners from the *Form* is the way I practice my deductive reasoning skills.”

“Technically speaking, what you are doing would not be termed deductive reasoning,” McDermott responded.

“Really? What would it be termed, then?”

“Your selection of a horse would be *inductive* reasoning. You are utilizing a historical database, weighing a number of established facts, and drawing an inductive conclusion. Deductive reasoning is a different discipline of logic. A deductive argument is frequently stated in the form of a syllogism.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t want to make you angry.”

I remembered the three thousand tuition. “It’s okay, kid, I didn’t mean to snap at you. What were you saying?”

“Well, a syllogism consists of three parts: the major premise, the minor premise, and the conclusion. For example, I could construct this syllogism:

“All men wear underwear.

“I am a man.

“Therefore, I wear underwear.”

“Yes,” I said, “but all men don’t wear underwear.”

“It doesn’t matter. The syllogism

is true as stated even though it may not be true in the real world. If the major premise 'All men wear underwear' is correct, then the minor premise and the conclusion are correct. If you want the syllogism to solve a real problem, the major and minor premises must be factual as they relate to the real world."

"How can something be true but not factual?" I asked, then wished I hadn't.

"I guess you could say the syllogism can be true logically but factually false, if that makes any sense to you." McDermott closed his eyes. "Consider this:

"Sixty men can do a piece of work sixty times as quickly as one man.

"One man can dig a post-hole in sixty seconds.

"Therefore, sixty men can dig a post-hole in one second."

"That was written by a fellow named Ambrose Bierce before the turn of the century. This example is logically false and factually false. Obviously the major premise is false. Sixty men cannot do a piece of work sixty times as quickly as one man in all instances. But the logic fails because the syllogism is misstated. It should read something like:

"Sixty men can do sixty times the work of one man.

"One man can dig a post-hole in sixty seconds.

"Therefore, sixty men can dig sixty post-holes in sixty seconds."

"This is all enormously entertaining, McDermott," I broke in. "But you know, I don't really give a damn about it. Now, post time is one P.M.

You can come along, or you can stay here and count post-holes. I'm heading for Calder."

I watched five winners hit the wire at under two to one. My reluctance to cover bet down favorites began to put the supreme hurt on my financial welfare, while McDermott, who admittedly was acutely unaware of which end of a horse did the eating, caught every winner.

"It would seem to me," he said in passing, "that the odds reflect the probable winner. It is illogical that you would bet other selections."

"You'll go broke eventually betting the chalk," I informed him. "You don't understand, but the betting public is wrong most of the time."

"I can see that," he replied. It was probably a shot, but I let it pass. There was an excellent chance that I would have to negotiate a loan from Mr. McDermott soon if I didn't catch a winner in the next race.

The sixth was a mile and a sixteenth on the turf for three-year-olds. Most had little or no grass experience. I had my eye on a well-muscled gray. He was a son of Fire Dancer, who traced to Northern Dancer, the premier sire of turf horses. The brood mare was a granddaughter of the mighty Seattle Slew, one of the top sires on any surface for the last half of the twentieth century.

This fellow's name was Really Bad Bob. Really Bad Bob had only run in sprints and never on the turf. His style was to cut wicked fractions, then stop on the lead after

leaving the eight pole. Calder's turf course had been particularly benevolent to front runners of late. I figured he had a chance.

My hot sweaty fist gripped the last sixteen dollars I owned. There were three minutes to post.

"This," said McDermott, "is incredibly simple. Look at the four horse, he's even money." He pulled his winnings from his shirt pocket. "Let's see, I'm ahead forty-two dollars. I'm going to put it all on the four horse." He turned to me. "Even money—that's almost a sure thing, isn't it?"

"Almost," I concurred.

There was an incredible temptation to plunk down my sixteen bucks on McDermott's chalk horse. He had turf experience. He'd run second last time out, besting half the same field he faced today. Every bit of logic pointed to the chalk—number four, Threes Your Point. Radiating up from my bowels, however, was a different message, one that encompassed thirty years of horseplaying experience. Thirty years of paying tuition at the track teaches distrust, doubt, and suspicion, and a predilection to go with your instincts. I put the mangled, sweaty sixteen dollars on the two horse, Really Bad Bob. He dropped to forty to one when my bet was introduced to the win pool.

Needless to say, it was one hell of a race. Really Bad Bob broke out on top and took a three length lead in the backstretch. After a half mile he was joined by number four, Threes Your Point. This, then, would be the test.

Ten thousand chalk players

screaming for their even-money, can't-lose favorite, went silent at the quarter pole when Really Bad Bob, swishing his gray-black tail, pulled easily to a clear lead. The pack came on, of course, but much too late. Really Bad Bob wins it by a length and a half.

Threes Your Point, exhausted by the fractions, runs next to last.

"YOU LOUSY BASTARD!" McDermott screams at his puffing, even-money horse as it stumbles past.

As I count my six hundred fifty-two dollars and eighty cents' worth of winnings, McDermott gives me an anguished look and vows (dredging up an ancient Celtic prayer that, if broken, would sacrifice his unborn children) never to return to the racetrack. This only proves that there are some dysfunctional people who are incapable of enjoying the races.

McDermott was a good kid, but I was set in my ways—used to doing things in a solitary fashion. His lingering just at my elbow was becoming a bit irritating, particularly since he was no longer content to hone his deducing skills on *The Racing Form*.

Finally he went into one of his close-your-eyes-and-replay routines and presented me with what you could call the dog game. An activity, he claimed, he found in some obscure exercises-in-logic book. The idea was to choose a well-known personage at random—some luminary whose personality, character traits, and general outlook on life were common knowledge. It was then required to deduce (infer) log-

ically what kind of dog that person should own. The dog, of course, should reflect him in deed, manner, looks, and so forth.

It seemed a stupid idea to begin with, but it passed the time and was, occasionally, rather entertaining. He suckered me in with Winston Churchill. "Come on," he said, "try it. You know Churchill pretty well."

"I'm trying to read the *Form* here," I reminded him, flipping the page violently to the Calder charts.

"All right then, I'll start. Churchill would have a big loud dog. He was vociferous and bombastic in nature. A nervous mastiff would be my guess."

I couldn't let this sacrilege pass. "You're full of it. Churchill's dog would be pugnacious, bite and hold on, persistent in the face of all odds. A bulldog, by God—he'd have an English bulldog."

And so it went. We spent the afternoon analyzing every world leader in the Second World War. We agreed on Churchill even though McDermott told me later that Churchill's dog was named Rufus, and Rufus was a poodle. Hitler, we figured, would have an aggressive, vicious dog that gulped his food. Undoubtedly a German breed. McDermott opted for a rottweiler. I decided on a Doberman. I figured Stalin's dog for a she-wolf that was afraid to fight and ate its young.

"What about De Gaulle?" McDermott asked. "He'd have a French poodle with a big nose, wouldn't he?"

I had gotten into the mood of the thing by this time. "I'll buy the poodle. De Gaulle was a patriot of the

first order. He wouldn't own anything *but* a French dog. Not one of those tiny little poodles—and no cutesie poodle cut. How about a big hairy poodle with nasty sharp teeth that never learned how to roll over."

Then McDermott started on Mussolini. "He'd have a dog that walked around on his hind legs all the time—a little fat scruffy dog."

"Yeah," I agreed. "One of them annoying dogs that's always trying to sniff your . . ."

The phone rang, interrupting my rational explanation. It was our first case. Sid Perdue was in the hospital for a hemorrhoid operation. His manager, Jeff Casey, was calling to ask if I'd look into a security problem at Sid's feed store. He didn't give any details on the phone. He said only that Sid wanted me to check it out.

Perdue's Feed and Supply was in Dania, a few miles north of Miami. My '65 Mustang convertible suffered from chronic nearly-out-of-gas condition. McDermott, eager to venture forth on his first case, volunteered the use of his shiny new BMW.

On the way to Sid's we finished off all the world leaders we could conjure up. Casting about for another nominee for the dog game, McDermott asked if I could think of somebody in science. He mentioned Louis Pasteur, but I didn't know much about him. I suggested Albert Einstein.

"Would Einstein have a big dog or a small dog?" McDermott asked.

"Well, he was old. Old people have small dogs."

"He wasn't always old," McDer-

mott observed. "He could have had a dog any time. Let's say he had the dog when he was formulating his general theory of relativity."

"Einstein wasn't able to take care of a dog then," I said. "Theories of relativity take a lot of concentration. The dog could have puked in his shoes and he wouldn't have noticed. And who would feed it?"

"Well, what about Mrs. Einstein?" said McDermott. "She could have taken care of the dog."

"Oh no you don't. You can't get Mrs. Einstein in on this. This is about Albert. It's his dog."

We didn't seem to be getting anywhere with Einstein's dog.

I'm always nervous when I'm not driving, especially going up I-95, or down for that matter. A careless lane change and you could become the highlight in a traffic school movie. Maybe that's why I noticed the silver Mercury Cougar with the scrape along the driver's side front fender. Early on, the Cougar came up the adjacent lane almost to the BMW's rear bumper, then backed off.

I wasn't really sure it was tailing us, but it stayed three cars back and followed us off the exit ramp. I had to provide McDermott with directions to the feed store. A couple of turns later, when I looked back, the Cougar was gone. I told McDermott that I thought maybe the Cougar had been following us. He made the observation that it was my imagination. "Why should anybody be following us?" he asked.

He had me there.

"You know what your problem is, Joe?"

"I bet you're going to tell me."

"You're always looking for the worst, always anticipating trouble."

"Well, I'll tell you this," I said. "Trouble is something you can count on. It's always with you like a drunken, deadbeat relative. Not in your face every minute maybe, but always lurking about, ready to make an appearance at the most inopportune time."

"You remind me of Housman. Are you familiar with Housman?"

"I knew an exercise boy named Houseman a few years back. His uncle ran a meat market on Seventy-ninth Street in Hialeah. He had a real big wart on his ear as I recall—not the kid, the uncle."

"I'm talking about A. E. Housman, the poet."

"Him I don't know," I said.

He began to recite poetry, this time without closing his eyes:

*"Therefore, since the world has still
Much good, but much less good
than ill,*

And while the sun and moon endure

*Luck's a chance, but trouble's sure,
I'd face it as a wise man would
And train for ill and not for good."*

I mentioned to McDermott that it would be a good idea to forsake the poetic urges when we were within earshot of any human person. Might give them the wrong idea.

When we met Jeff in the feed store, I made the introductions. "Jeff Casey, this is one of my operatives, McDermott." McDermott was beaming and, if the truth were known, silently enjoying the name upgrade I'd given him.

Casey took us to the back of the

building. This, he explained, was the problem area.

A chain-link fence six feet high, with another six inches at the top made up of two strands of barbed wire, secured a rectangular area extending one hundred feet from the rear of the building. It was about one hundred thirty feet across. A sliding twenty foot chainlink gate could be rolled open in the middle of the back fence to allow trucks in and out during store hours. The front and back of the building faced north and south. A concrete driveway ran parallel to the fence on each side, separating the fence on the east and the fence on the west from the adjacent properties.

At night two trucks were parked inside the enclosure on the west side. Another truck and a dumpster were on the east side of the enclosure. Along each side of the gate on the south or back side were bundles of fenceposts and stacks of rough-cut sixteen foot fence boards.

Farm gates for sale were also stacked against the fence, one end against the dock at the back of the building and the other end toward the dumpster on the east side. Opposite was a similar stack of gates arranged the same way, one end at the dock, the other facing the trucks.

Casey showed us that six inches inside the fence, about five feet high and circling the perimeter of the enclosure, was an infrared beam. The beam, if broken by someone scaling the fence, would set off a silent alarm. The overhead and back doors to the building had a separate interior alarm.

The county sheriff's department,

Casey explained, charged the feed store twenty-five dollars every time they were called on a false alarm. Someone had been coming over the fence once or twice a week, breaking the infrared beam and setting off the alarm. The deputies never found anyone, or any evidence of a break-in. It had been going on for over a month, and the county was threatening to cancel the alarm permit.

"What are they stealing?" I asked.

"That's just it," said Casey. "A couple of times at closing, before he came over the fence, we counted every post, every board, every gate—we even measured the diesel fuel in the truck tanks. Whatever is missing, we can't figure it out. We even put horsehairs between the fence boards; they weren't moved."

"What about a bird or an animal?" McDermott asked.

"I don't think so," said Casey. "Not once or twice a week for a month. It never happened before last month."

I walked the length of the fence looking for how somebody could clear the barbed wire without a blood donation. There didn't seem to be any fiber clinging to the barbs, which might indicate that a blanket or pad was used to blunt the sharp points. It was barely possible that someone had used a ladder or stood on the cab of a pickup in the driveway. If he were agile, he might be able to jump over the fence onto the hood of a parked truck. But he would have to be part monkey. In any case, what was he after?

Adjacent to the store on the west side, across the driveway, was some kind of warehouse building and

most of the rest of the block to the west was composed of various commercial buildings. To the east, between the feed store driveway and the next corner, were three single family houses. The back yard of each was enclosed in a chain-link fence, and each had a gate opening into the alley that ran through the block and allowed access to the feed store's back dock. Behind the feed store, across the alley, was vacant land.

It took ten minutes to figure it out. The tip-off was the twenty foot sports fisher, the wading pool, and the teeter-totter behind house number two. I walked back to McDermott.

"What do you make of it?" I asked him.

"It doesn't make any sense. They break in and don't take anything—I think it could be the rain doing it."

"Why don't we try some of your deductive reasoning. Could you formulate any kind of syllogism to give us a clue on this? What would be the major premise?"

McDermott thought about it before speaking. "I guess the major premise would be :

"Property is broken into to take something.

"This property was broken into and nothing was taken.

"Therefore, this property wasn't broken into."

"You're almost right. Except, you remember the crazy one you told me about the post-holes? The major premise was in error because it didn't cover every possible instance of a piece of work. In this case, what if I told you I was going to break in to this feed store and leave a bomb?

What then? Shouldn't your major premise include that possibility?"

McDermott nodded. "Okay, sure, of course it should. How about:

"Property is broken into to take something or leave something.

"This property was broken into and nothing was taken.

"Therefore—are you telling me somebody left something here?"

"That's my guess. Look at the second house. What do you see?"

McDermott walked farther down the alley to get a better angle on the front drive of house number two. "A pickup truck and a minivan in the drive. Boat in the back yard. A wading pool, swing set, and teeter-totter."

"What do you conclude from all that?"

"The guy's got a couple of kids, and he likes to fish."

"What are you getting at?" Casey wanted to know.

"Did the guy with the boat just move in recently?" I asked him.

"Yeah, now that you mention it. That family moved in about a month back. I remember because they had a hell of a time getting the boat up the drive and into the back yard. The gate in the back fence was too small. You saying that guy is causing the problem?"

"He's the logical one," I told him. "He's got the kids and the boat hook."

"I don't get it," said Casey.

"I think I've got it!" McDermott blurted out.

"Okay, McDermott, tell him where the answer is," I prompted.

"The answer is in the dumpster," said McDermott. "The guy with the

kids has more garbage than he has cans for. When he loads up with garbage, he stands on the bed of his pickup in the driveway, reaches over the top of the fence with the boat hook, breaks the infrared beam when he opens the dumpster lid, then drops in the garbage bags. He closes the lid when he's done. He doesn't realize there is security on the fence."

"That's very good, McDermott," I said. "There may be hope for you yet."

A simple inspection of the dumpster verified the theory. Foreign garbage bags were evident. I told Casey that Sid would get my bill. We left him to deal with the prolific fisherman.

McDermott, on the way back to the office, determined that he was beginning to see that understanding logic and its practical application were two different disciplines. I consoled him by mentioning that experience and life in the real world allowed me a distinct advantage. I told him he was doing very well. We still had to go to the end of the week.

During the ride back I brought up Einstein's dog again. "So Einstein is working on some formulas late at night. His dog is eating his slippers and begins to choke on a piece of the inner padding. Is Einstein going to break off his concentration to pat the dog on the back? Let's see, $e=mc^2$... cough cough ... damn dog ... where was I? Or suppose he gets up to go for his slide rule and he steps in ..."

"Okay, okay, I get the point," said McDermott, breaking my logical

stream. "But you're missing the purpose here. Whether Einstein takes care of the dog is immaterial. What counts is what kind of dog would best reflect the man. The dog can starve to death for all I give a damn."

"I don't know," I said. "I'll have to think about it some more. There's something elusive here, different from Hitler, Churchill, and the rest."

The phone was ringing when we walked through the office door. It was our second case. I made a note to be sure the phone bill got paid in the future. It seemed to help business.

This call was from a woman. She said she was separated from her husband and wanted to catch him with his girlfriend so she would have evidence for court. She gave me the address of the Regal Arms hotel on Collins Avenue. Said she would meet me in the lobby at four o'clock.

Collins Avenue is in Miami Beach. And I knew the Regal Arms. It was a fleabag refuge for pensioners in South Beach. A strange place to meet, I thought, but haste was required. It was a quarter past three.

The Regal Arms was one of the few remaining vestiges of art deco architecture on the beach. McDermott dropped me in front and went to search out a parking spot.

It was nearly four when I headed up the steps. Everything in the place had been in much better condition in 1928, including the humanity lolling about in the tiny lobby.

"Mr. Standard." It was a call from behind me.

The woman was young for this place. No more than twenty-five or -six.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I was on the porch when you went past. I wasn't sure if it was you. You are from Standard Investigations?"

I admitted as much and went out to the front verandah with her. The old folks had deserted the open porch. There wasn't any air conditioning in the lobby, but there wasn't any four o'clock Miami sun in your face either.

I knew I'd never met the woman before; still, there was something vaguely familiar about her. We had just formulated our seating arrangements when McDermott pounded up the steps, displaying an enthusiastic energy that the old steps, I can say with conviction, had rarely been forced to endure in recent history.

"I had to go over two blocks to find a place," he reported without being asked.

McDermott took notes. The woman told us her name was Mrs. Jennifer DeVega. She felt sure that her husband was seeing a woman during their separation. She wanted us to get photographic evidence and be available to testify.

"How long have you been separated from your husband?" I asked.

"It's been almost a month now," she said.

"You live here in the hotel?" McDermott asked.

"Just until today. I'm moving in with my sister in Lake Worth tonight."

She gave us a mobile phone number to reach her by, along with her

husband's address. Their house was located in west Hialeah in the Miami Lakes area.

"What about a picture?" I asked. "Do you have a picture of your husband that we might use?"

She handed over a five by seven photograph. It showed a guy in his late forties, balding, just about to get into the driver's side of a maroon Eldorado. It wasn't a very good picture.

"I have to get packed," she said, plunking two hundred dollar bills into my hand. "Is that the right amount? On TV the private detectives always want a two hundred dollar retainer."

"That's fine," I said. "We'll be in touch. Come on, McDermott." She sat on the porch and watched us leave.

We cleared the steps and walked down the block, McDermott more or less leading the way. "That was rather abrupt, wasn't it?" McDermott asked. "I mean, we don't know where her husband works, we don't know . . ."

"It doesn't matter," I said. "She didn't want to tell us any more. I've talked to a hundred women in the same situation this one says she's in. You don't have to ask them questions. Without fail in my experience, within ten minutes you will know even the tiniest detail of the family history, every dirty dark secret will be unveiled, and you will be repeatedly reminded of what a bum she married. The woman we just talked to was lying through her teeth. I wonder if she even knows the guy in the picture. And talking about the picture, wouldn't you ex-

pect a family picture with the wife and kids? Look at the grain in the one she gave us. It was shot with a telephoto lens and enlarged. Looks like something you'd give a hit man."

"Why would she make it up? I mean, I don't understand what there is to gain."

"I don't know yet. But something's wrong. I'm just not sure what." I put my arm in front of McDermott and stopped.

"What?" McDermott asked.

"See that silver Cougar on the other side of the street with the scrape on the front fender? That's the car that was following us this morning."

We continued in silence to the BMW. I kept asking myself the same question: what the hell was the woman up to?

McDermott slid behind the wheel. "Where to?"

"Back to the office," I directed. "I have to pick up a few things. Then let's see if we can find Mr. DeVega and figure out what's going on."

I used McDermott's car phone to call Swine. Swine was Frankie Swinehart, a guy I used part-time. He was skinny with bug eyes and a thyroid on time-and-a-half. Years of acid rock music, I use the term music loosely, had turned most of his brain to oatmeal and made him nearly deaf in his left ear. But I didn't use him to think. Beyond his shortcomings, he was loyal, dependable, afraid of nothing, and worked cheap. Also, we'd played the horses together on more than numerous occasions. Swine had recently secured a job with Calder Racecourse

security, which caused him to give up the shirt pocket radio and earphones that had previously adorned his noggin like perpetual earmuffs.

There was something really wrong about this case. I didn't know what, but I figured Swine would give me some additional options once I found out what was going on.

I caught him at Calder before he left for the day. "Meet me at the office," I told him. "I should be there in a half hour." I listened to silence from his end. "There's fifty in it for you."

"Just for tonight?" he asked.

"Tonight—maybe tomorrow. But that's another fifty. Bring Leroy with you."

Swine was waiting in front of the Sunbelt Realty building, where I have my office. I introduced him to McDermott, and we went inside together. "I thought you were bringing someone named Leroy with you," McDermott said.

"This is Leroy," said Swine. He put a blackjack with a three pound lead core covered with stitched black leather on the desk. Attached to it was a leather loop to secure it to the user's wrist in the event of a scuffle.

"What's that?" asked McDermott.

"That," I told him, "is a force for good to be used in the battle between good and evil. When evil presents itself, you merely bounce this instrument off the side of evil's skull thusly." I brought the sap down with moderate force on top of the desk. It favored us with a resounding thud, leaving a noticeable dent.

I went to my bookcase, withdrew *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, and laid it on the desk. I opened the cover and pulled my automatic from the hollowed-out interior.

"You really do have a gun," said McDermott excitedly. "I thought you were just leading me on. Do you have a name for it?"

"Yes, I call it a nine millimeter Beretta."

"Now you're makin' me nervous," Swine admitted, picking up his sap and stuffing it in his rear pocket with the loop hanging out. "Fifty bucks ain't going to keep me around long if you have to shoot that thing. What kind of trouble are you expecting, anyway?"

"I can't tell yet. I'm guessing some scumbag that I've crossed swords with in the past is setting me up, either to do me in, or to put me in the compromising position of patsy. Actually, I'm not sure of anything. Still, I've got this gut feeling it's going to turn nasty. We need to be prepared."

I sent Swine and Leroy down the street in my '65 chartreuse Mustang convertible for five dollars' worth of gas. When the door closed behind them, I asked McDermott if he could close his eyes and conjure up a map, to give us an idea of where the DeVega address was in Miami Lakes. He shrugged. "Sorry. It doesn't work that way." But he did retrieve a city map from the glove box of the BMW. The address was out in the northwest end of Miami Lakes. Because the map was a few years old, it showed the street as part of a proposed devel-

opment. The DeVegas were living in what is commonly referred to in colloquial Dade County English as the boondocks. Another sixteenth of an inch west on the map would have put them in the swamp.

I decided we would take both cars. Whoever had been following in the silver Mercury knew the BMW. Chances were good that they also knew the Mustang, but there was a chance they didn't.

I took my good camera with me and McDermott in the BMW. Swine followed in the Mustang. We left the Palmetto Expressway at Miami Lakes Drive to head west. About a mile from where I figured the place should be, we found a shopping center. McDermott parked the BMW, and we all piled into the Mustang. Darkness was beginning to become a factor.

The proposed development didn't appear to be developing with much dispatch. The area was desolate compared with the rest of Miami Lakes. A few houses were under construction; several were completed but empty; only a few had a car in the driveway and looked lived in. DeVega's street was at the far end.

If the entrance to the development looked desolate, the DeVegas' area was an absolute wasteland. There was DeVega's house in the middle of the block with the maroon Eldorado in the driveway and one other house under construction at the other end of the street. In between the two houses, and for the entire length of the block on the opposite side of the street, was a wilderness of scrub brush and pine trees.

I turned the Mustang around and started back out to the main street. As we passed DeVega's house, he came out and got in the Eldorado. I took the Mustang to the entrance of the development and pulled off to the side. When the Eldorado sailed by, I waited a short time, then followed, keeping well back.

"You thought any more about Einstein's dog?" McDermott asked as we sat three cars back from the Eldorado at a stoplight.

"I've got an idea about it," I said. "But why don't you ask Swine what he thinks."

McDermott posed the question of Einstein's dog to Swine in the back seat. Swine had withdrawn Leroy from his hip pocket, no longer able to endure the discomfort of sitting on the force for good.

"Einstein?" Swine answered. "Isn't that a piano?"

It was truly a case of a sap with a sap in his lap.

The Eldorado went another mile before pulling into the parking lot of Delbert's 37 Club.

McDermott and Swine went back for the BMW. I instructed Swine to take the Mustang to DeVega's house and keep an eye out. Because the Mustang on that desolate street would stand out like a kangaroo in a frog jumping contest, I told Swine to camp out somewhere in the vicinity where he could keep an eye on things until we got there. I followed DeVega into Delbert's 37 Club. The best way to find out what was going on was to determine what part DeVega played in this production. The best way to do that was to ask him.

I suspect I had been concentrat-

ing too strenuously on Einstein's dog and the intricacies of this investigation to note the obvious when I first walked into Delbert's. When I took a barstool next to DeVega, there was no chance I could disregard the extraordinary bartender. He was no less than six feet four inches tall, wearing dangling earrings, heavy mascara, and a plethora of eyeliner and rouge. He sort of reminded me of an Egyptian pharaoh before aspiring to mummy status. Slowly I turned on my stool to witness two guys dancing cheek to cheek on the dance floor. It didn't require any of McDermott's advanced studies in logic to figure out the uniqueness of Delbert's 37 Club. I refused to entertain the stupid proposition that came to mind, namely, what kind of dog the bartender might own. It would be a good challenge for McDermott once the case was over.

When I turned back to the bar, I found DeVega staring at me intently. "Hi," he said.

This, I could see right off, was not going in the direction I had planned. "Hello," I managed to mumble. This brilliant response was just another step down a road I didn't want to travel. My mind raced frantically, searching for a way to get the information I needed and get out. The question of the bartender's dog kept muddling my thoughts.

"You come here often?" DeVega asked.

"Not as a rule," I said. "I just came in to talk to you."

"How nice," he said.

"Wait a minute. I don't want you to get the wrong idea."

I wanted to tell him I was a private investigator and ask about his wife's case, but she was paying me. She was the client. I had to maintain confidentiality, particularly with her husband. "I just want to ask you a couple of questions," I continued feebly.

He didn't answer. All he did was look at me sideways. "I'm a private detective. That's why I ask questions," I blurted out. If there was a more stupid remark that could have come to my mind, it failed to present itself. Still, he only stared and said nothing. For my part, I had exhausted my storehouse of insipid, nonsensical conversation.

Finally he motioned to the pharaoh. "Millie," he said, "give me and my friend a drink." Then he turned back to me. "Well, why don't you ask me something?"

"Whatelyahave?" Millie wanted to know. He walked like a ballerina and had a voice like Deadhorse DeFarge's nephew Doug, who sang bass through his nose and played the tambourine with the folk group The Minced Onions. But that's another story.

"Nothing for me, thanks," I told Millie.

"I don't talk unless you drink," said DeVega.

"Bourbon and water."

"Oh, that's a man's drink," Millie remarked, upgrading an octave to make the comment in a baritone.

It was at this point that McDermott came in and plopped down on the barstool next to me. Every eye in the joint zeroed in on him.

The thought then occurred to me, belatedly, that if the young lady at

the Regal Arms Hotel was married to the guy buying me drinks, she had a much bigger problem than she realized.

McDermott by this time had spotted the bartender. The perplexity he displayed at the sight changed slowly to bewilderment when the fat guy with a five o'clock shadow in a strapless evening gown came out on the small stage behind the bar and started to lip synch to a popular rendition of "I Am Woman."

McDermott gave me a pained expression that said what the hell kind of place is this? I held up my hand, meaning, I know what you want to ask; I'll explain later.

I turned back to DeVega, who was attempting to squint over my shoulder at McDermott.

"Why don't you introduce me to your friend?" DeVega said.

"Maybe I would if I knew your name," I fired back, the first step in my recovery from brain shock.

"Oh, sorry." He held out his hand. "The name is Delbert. I own this place."

I shook hands with him. "Delbert DeVega?" I asked.

"Who?"

"Isn't your last name DeVega?"

"Not hardly. My mother was from Colombia, but my father was an Irishman. My last name is Kelly."

"Then I don't suppose you're married to a woman named Jennifer?"

"What do you think?" Kelly responded.

I took the picture from my shirt pocket and let him have a look. "Is that you in the picture?"

"Looks like somebody took this with a telephoto lens," he said. I

reached to take it back, but he pulled it away. "This picture was taken today," he volunteered. "As a matter of fact, it was taken this morning. Where did you get it?"

"How do you know it was taken today?"

"For the last couple of years I've been driving that Cadillac with a piece of the front bumper torn off. I just got the car back from the repair shop yesterday evening. The only time that picture could have been taken was this morning when I came down to open the club for the delivery guys. Where did you get it?"

I told him where I got it. He didn't seem to know any more than I did. At this point he was no longer interested in me but insisted on an introduction to McDermott. So I introduced him.

"This is McDermott. He's with Vice."

"Oh," said Kelly. He gave McDermott a grin and a nod.

I drained my bourbon, thanked Delbert for the drink, and started for the door with McDermott in tow. McDermott ran a gauntlet of well-wishers before getting outside.

"Where to now?" he asked, once back in the BMW.

"Hang on a minute," I answered. "I need a little time to put this in perspective." Nothing about the case made any sense. The woman who hired us must have known absolutely nothing about Delbert Kelly. So why did she want to pay me two hundred to follow somebody she didn't know? And why Delbert? But perhaps I was being selfish about this. Maybe I wasn't the target. The

picture of Delbert was taken in the morning and presented to me in the afternoon. The woman didn't even take the time to find out the guy's name. Hell, a look in his mailbox would have accomplished that. So maybe time was a factor. Nothing unusual had happened recently except I got a new partner—McDermott. Then it finally jelled. I knew why Delbert was chosen. And I knew what was coming down.

"It's like Einstein's dog," I said.

"What is?" McDermott asked.

"This case—the answer was obvious. But we were busy counting apples when we should have been counting oranges, just like with Einstein's dog."

"I don't follow."

"Einstein didn't concern himself with those things that motivate the average mortal: things like patriotism, power, greed, conquest, lust. His satisfaction in life was achieved by unraveling the nature of the universe through mathematics and pure quantum leaps of thought. If Einstein's dog reflected Einstein and his thinking, it too would be uncorrupted and unmotivated by physical forces. The dog would be inflexible, rigid, and unchanging like an equation. A ceramic dog might fit the bill."

"What's that got to do with the case?" McDermott asked.

"That's what I mean about apples and oranges. This is not a case. This is something else entirely." I gave serious thought to laying it all out for McDermott before we started back to stake out Delbert's house. I couldn't because I couldn't be sure he wasn't a part of it.

"Are you going to tell me or not?"

"I'll tell you this much. The only reason Delbert was chosen for us to follow was the location of his house."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"Maybe not. But the whole idea was for us to stake out this house. So that's what we'll do. Let's go."

As we cruised into the undeveloped development, I couldn't spot Swine anyplace. That made me apprehensive. Distress didn't set in until we turned into Delbert's street. There, parked on the wooded side of the street just down from Delbert's house, sat the shadowy form of a Mercury Cougar.

"Stay on the other side of the street," I ordered, then: "Stop here." We were fifty yards from the Cougar. I pulled the Beretta from my waistband, my eyes fastened on the car across the way.

"Can I open this door without the interior lights going on?" I asked.

McDermott shrugged. "I don't think so."

The Mercury looked abandoned. I couldn't see any movement in or around it. I got out quickly and pointed in its general direction. "You stay put," I told McDermott. "I'm going over for a look-see."

He must have come out of the woods behind me; I never even got to turn around. I felt the cold steel on my neck before the guy spoke.

"Hand over your weapon," he instructed.

"Take off, McDermott!" I shouted.

"If you move, I shoot," the fellow behind me warned McDermott. He ordered me away from the door. "You!" he shouted in to McDermott, "Get out of the car on this side."

He lined up McDermott and me with our backs to the BMW and gave us a gander at his ski mask and shiny snub-nosed .38. "Okay, you can come out," he called over his shoulder. Another figure emerged from the woods. A woman with a stocking over her head. Ski Mask held both my automatic and his revolver on us.

"Tie their hands behind them," he told her. She took some cord from her jacket pocket. "Him first," he said, motioning at McDermott.

"What do you think you're doing?" McDermott protested. "What do you want with us?"

I could read the fear in his voice. It was obvious that he wasn't in on it. "They think they're going to kidnap you," I said.

"There ain't no thinkin' about it," Ski Mask assured me. "We're takin' him."

"Well, you're right about the no thinking part," I said.

I could see Swine in the shadow cast by the woods, creeping slowly up the sidewalk with Leroy high. McDermott had turned to present his hands to the woman. She had her back turned. I stepped to my right as if moving out of the woman's way. Ski Mask followed, turning with me just the slightest bit—just enough.

"I doubt if a stupid punk like you has the IQ to pull this off," I offered for his consideration. "I know you don't have the *cojones*." I got no response. "Anybody as ugly as you ought to wear a mask even when they ain't pullin' a job."

"What do I care what you . . . " That's as far as he got before the

force for good bounced off the top of his head. He dropped, unconscious, and my automatic skidded against his feet. The woman snatched it up and leveled it at Swine and me.

"Stay right where you are!" she screeched.

"We aren't going anywhere," I assured her. "But stay tuned. You aren't either."

"Wake him up," she commanded.

"You'll need an emergency room for that," I said. "And while we're passing the time, that weapon you have in your hand is a nine millimeter Beretta. Normally that gun can fire sixteen rounds—fifteen in the clip and one in the chamber."

She began to back away slowly. I followed, slowly. "But that happens to be my Beretta. I only put ten rounds in the clip. The last five are too tough to get in—too much tension on the clip spring. Also, I never carry with a cartridge in the chamber, nor do I carry without the safety being engaged."

I walked quickly forward and jerked the automatic from her hand. "So as you noticed while you were pulling the trigger in your attempt to shoot me, the gun cannot fire until you load a round into the firing chamber, turn off the safety, and *then* pull the trigger." I grabbed her arm and put the Beretta back in my belt. "Of course, now it's too late. The lesson is over."

"Better call an ambulance for this guy," Swine announced, peering under Ski Mask's eyelid.

McDermott used his car phone to

call the cops and an ambulance. It wasn't until the next day that we were able to unravel the whole story. The reason the woman at the Regal Arms looked strangely familiar revealed itself. She was the sister of Judy the maid, the gal who served the coffee at Matilda's estate. She had the same full but scrunched up lips and big eyes as Judy. Judy didn't know anything about it. She just let her sister in on all the gossip at the mansion.

The sister and her boyfriend had decided to kidnap McDermott more than a week ago but couldn't come up with a way to catch him alone. It was impossible to get him behind the iron gates. When the boyfriend got word about McDermott's studies with me, they devised the plan. They anticipated that I might ask for a photo. The boyfriend found one of the most desolate areas in Miami, Delbert's neighborhood. After he took the picture of Delbert, his girlfriend got it developed in an hour while he was tailing us in his Cougar, waiting for a chance opportunity to snatch Chatsworth as he put it. But he lost us in traffic. The girlfriend waited for me on the porch of the Regal Arms, laid the bogus story on me, and the rest is history.

And, oh yes, the reason for their haste. They figured they only had until the end of the week. They suspected that I would be successful in souring McDermott on the private eye business. I couldn't have done it without them.

FICTION

TREASURE HUNTERS

William T. Lowe



Illustration by Rachel Snow

Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine 5/00

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The Blue Ax was never my kind of place. When I was a deputy, I had to come out here almost every week to break up a fight. The floor is always dirty, the glasses never quite clean, and the place reeks of tobacco smoke. But I had agreed to meet Royce Call here because I knew he was in bad trouble. He had been arrested for grand larceny, timber theft.

From where I sat in a back booth I overheard some of the talk at the pool table. "They may throw the book at him; Royce has been stealin' trees a long time . . ." "He overstepped himself this time, goin' on private property . . ." "The rangers got him cold, truckload of white ash. Could have got a good price for that . . ."

Timber piracy happens a lot in the Adirondacks. A logger will sneak onto the Forest Preserve—there's no way the state can adequately patrol three million acres—cut down some choice hardwoods like maple and birch, and sell them to a sawmill or a furniture manufacturer.

If you get caught, the fine is only ten bucks a tree; it's been that since 1806. Back in 1995 two men stole more than two thousand trees from state land before they got caught. They pleaded innocent, of course.

Royce Call slid into a booth across from me. He's a young man, not yet thirty, clean-shaven. He was dressed in the logger's uniform, wool shirt, jeans, half-boots.

Like a lot of other loggers Royce could have made a decent living contracting for pulp wood for the paper mills, clearing woodlots, harvesting hardwood for private owners, landing the occasional high bid to go on state land to fell and remove specified state timber. But he got too hungry, and he got caught.

I was overseas with Royce's father. He wouldn't be very proud of his son right now.

"Thanks for coming, Hank," Royce said.

"You got greedy," I said. I wasn't about to be sympathetic.

"Yeah." He wouldn't look at me. "The man who owns that woodlot is never at home . . ." he began.

"And you thought he'd never miss a few trees. Grow up, Royce!" I was sure he was going to ask me for money, for a lawyer or something. "You've been charged yet?" I asked him.

"That's what I want to talk to you about, Uncle Hank." Royce looked around nervously. "You know Mr. LaPorte? The Canadian fellow who owns that property?"

"You mean the man whose trees you tried to steal?" He nodded. "I've seen him," I admitted.

Edmund LaPorte was a wealthy Canadian who had a summer home on Union Lake. He and some other families from Montreal owned most of the lakefront property and a few hundred acres each. LaPorte was a rather stout, balding man in his fifties, and his wife was a younger, very attractive woman who, I heard, had been on a Canadian swimming team.



They always dressed fashionably and drove a Mercedes sedan and a big Pontiac station wagon.

I supposed the rangers or the police had told LaPorte about the theft on his property, and he'd come down to check it out.

"I know who he is," I said again. "Talk to me, Royce."

Royce leaned toward me. "Mr. LaPorte says he won't press the charges if I go to work for him," he almost whispered.

I stared at him. "Won't press the charges? You work for him? Doing what?"

"He says I know trees," Royce answered in the same low voice.

"Of course you do," I snapped. "That's why you're in this mess!" He kept his head down. "Tell me the rest of it, son," I said, "or I'm leaving."

"I've got to do something. My boys quit me, the bank repo'd my skidder . . ."

"You could always hire out," I said sternly.

"Suzann says I can make a lot of money working for them." Royce was trying to convince me that this was a good idea. Suzann had to be Mrs. LaPorte; I guessed that she already had Royce under her thumb. I began to think something was wrong, and I had to know what it was.

"Keep talking."

"They want to go on a treasure hunt," Royce said. A big grin spread over his face but died when he saw me glaring at him.

"They do, do they? What in hell did you tell them?"

Meekly he said, "I told them I'm in."

"I see." I sat back. "Can you swim?"

He stared at me, his mouth open. "Who told you about it, Hank? Was it Mr. LaPorte?"

"I just guessed." I got up. "Come on. We can't talk about it here."

We left the Blue Ax, and I told him to meet me in town. There's a little square off Main Street with benches around it. There was almost a full moon, and it had been dry; no mosquitoes.

Every region has its legends of hidden treasure. If you hang around the bars and restaurants in Key West, someone is bound to tell you about the treasure ship that sank off the beach not far away or the pirate gold buried in the sand. And in Arizona around the dude ranches near Wickenburg you'll hear stories about lost gold mines and the mother lode waiting to be rediscovered. Sometimes someone has a map and just needs a little front money to help you get rich overnight.

Up here in the Adirondacks it's the hardwood logs at the bottom of certain lakes and rivers. Choice, old-growth hardwood logs, cherry, curly maple, yellow birch; some logs can be worth thirty thousand dollars, maybe more. The annual rings are much closer together on old-growth trees; the wood is always in demand for making musical instruments like cellos and violins and for the finest furniture.

Before the turn of the century loggers cut trees all winter and held



them behind a dam on a river or a lake. In the spring when the water was high, they floated the logs on huge rafts downstream or across the lake to a mill.

Back then the forests in northern New York seemed inexhaustible, so when some logs sank to the bottom, it was easier to cut more than try to retrieve what was lost. Mountainsides were stripped bare to get lumber for factories and houses all over the East and for the charcoal needed to feed the iron furnaces in the valleys. Now of course we have selective harvesting and replanting.

Royce and I sat on a bench, the only people in the park. Now that his secret was out, Royce was quiet, even withdrawn.

"Where does LaPorte want to start his treasure hunt?" I asked.

"Union Lake. He's got a house there."

"I know." Union Lake would be a good place to search if you had the time and the money. A lot of logs were brought down Union River a hundred years ago to big sawmills around the lake.

"How does he propose to find logs on the bottom?"

"He already has."

"How in hell?"

"With side scan sonar, whatever that is. Suzann knows how to work it."

"I guess he's already got a boat, too."

"Pontoon boat, thirty footer."

"So what does he need you for, son?"

There was a touch of pride in his voice as he answered me. "Because neither of them can tell a pine from a maple. Can you believe that? They need me to identify the logs when we get them up."

"I think you need permission to do that," I said. "Bringing up logs from the lake like that."

"Suzann says they've already got the paperwork covered," Royce told me with all the assurance of a very young man.

I said something as seriously as I could. "Look, Royce, I knew your father. You get into something illegal, I'm coming after you. You got that?"

"Yes, sir."

It was the darkest part of the night when I got home. My headlights picked up a car parked in front of my carport. When I stopped, the driver turned on his parking lights and stepped out of the car.

It was a woman; she had short blonde hair and a shapely figure clad in some sort of pants suit. I recognized her; Mrs. LaPorte, the rich Canadian's wife.

"Good evening, Mr. Sessions," she said with a trace of the French accent most Canadians still have. She stood there calmly, perfectly at ease in a strange man's driveway. "I'm Suzann LaPorte."

"Evening," I said. I had no idea why she was there, but I remembered my manners. "Won't you come inside, ma'am?"



"Thank you, no." She took a step closer. "I happened to know you had a meeting with young Royce Call tonight. He may not have asked you to keep our arrangement confidential." She turned so the light was on her face and smiled at me. "So I'm asking you, Mr. Sessions. I'm sure you understand that we want to keep our little adventure a secret."

She smiled again and stepped back to her car. "Yes, ma'am," I said as she drove away.

But she hadn't just turned, she'd pivoted on one foot the way a fashion model does at the end of a runway, to call attention to her figure. Did she do that all the time, or was it just for me?

In the house I drank a cup of cold coffee. Why had Suzann LaPorte taken the trouble to find my house tonight? She and her husband could have come by in the morning. And why come alone? I thought she'd been appraising me, sizing me up. But for what?

In the morning I reminded myself that the French have a flair for the dramatic, like late night meetings. But I still felt I had been warned not to interfere with anything the LaPortes did.

Tom Andrews is a forest ranger for the state Department of Environmental Conservation, or DEC. He generally has breakfast at the M & M cafe. He knows I'm a retired deputy, and I sometimes ask a lot of questions.

"What's the story on this underwater harvesting of logs, Tom?"

"Against the law."

"It's been done over in the Finger Lakes and out in Wisconsin."

"Against the law in the Adirondacks."

"Explain it to me, Tom. There's some old trees up there on Whiteface. Some loggers come along after the Civil War and cut them down. They float the logs down the AuSable, except some of them sink and stay on the bottom for over a hundred years. I can't come along and fish them up and sell them?"

"Nope."

"Why not? They're not private property any longer."

"State property now."

"All the logs at the bottom of the lakes and rivers in the Forest Preserve?"

"Yep. What do you want to know for?"

"Just curious. Pass the syrup."

Usually I enjoy being out on the lake. It's so peaceful when the water is calm and the sun is bright but not too hot. A few big white clouds were hanging motionless in the sky like great ships at anchor.

I was a bit apprehensive, not sure what Tom Andrews and I would find. Reports had come in to him about a big flat boat out on Union Lake that had been there all day. Since I'd been asking questions about under-



water timber harvesting, Tom had asked me to come along in his small boat to investigate.

A big flat boat. It sounded like the LaPortes' pontoon boat—as far as I knew the only one on the lake. I hadn't seen Royce since that night; I worried that he had been told to stay away from me.

Tom cut his motor, and we drifted close to the big boat. Edmund LaPorte saw us coming and stepped toward the bow to meet us, smiling cordially.

We got a good look at all the gear on the flat deck of the boat. There was a small hoist with a long arm hanging over the bow, a generator chugging quietly amidships, an air compressor, folding chairs, and toward the stern two rolls of six foot heavy gauge fencing. Royce Call was stationed back by the generator; he waved but didn't speak.

LaPorte had on long sleeves, long pants, and a big hat. His face and the backs of his hands were covered with some thick white ointment to ward off sunburn. "Lovely day, gentlemen," he said jovially. "I'd ask you aboard, but there's not much room."

Tom got right to the point. "We got a report that you're netting fish out here," he said. It was a polite way to ask what LaPorte was doing.

The Canadian pointed toward the far shore. "That's my place over there," he said. "I'm fencing a pasture. My wife may bring in horses this fall." He waved at the rolls of fence wire. "I bought several rolls of fence wire downstate," he said, "offloaded them down at the narrows to bring up to my place by boat." He gave us a big smile. "Trouble is, wind came up, we damn near capsized, lost the whole load, fence, nails, that fence stretcher thing, whatcha call it?—a come-along—everything." He laughed. "It cost too much to leave it all down there for the fish, eh?"

Suddenly he pointed at a small line that ran from a cleat on the bow into the water. "Looks like Suzann's got another one." Something below was tugging on the line. In a moment Suzann LaPorte emerged from the water; she had on a face mask, a yellow wetsuit, air tanks, all the scuba gear. She clung to a boarding ladder and gave us a wave.

LaPorte handed her what looked like a roll of plastic; we later saw that it was an air bag connected to a hose. Suzann held the bag under her arm, kicked away from the boat, and disappeared into the water trailing the hose behind her. Royce opened the throttle on the generator and turned on the compressor.

We watched as the hose pulsed rhythmically. LaPorte gave us a nod and a smile. Ten minutes later the surface of the water roiled and churned. The inflated air bag surfaced first, bringing with it a roll of fencing. Royce and LaPorte swung the hoist arm over it and with Royce turning the crank brought the roll aboard. LaPorte beamed at us. "Pretty make-shift rig," he said proudly, patting the compressor, "but it gets the job done."

"Yes, sir," Tom said and started his outboard. "Well, good luck to you."



As we pulled away, I looked back. Suzann LaPorte was standing on the deck with her husband, watching us. Edmund LaPorte was smiling broadly. Suzann was looking directly at me, and she wasn't smiling at all.

Tom and I didn't say anything on the way back to his dock. After he tied up his boat, we stood looking out at the lake. The pontoon boat was out of sight from here.

"Man's got a right to retrieve his own fencing," Tom said.

"Right." It had occurred to me that a six foot roll of heavy gauge fence would weight almost as much as a ten foot log. I didn't say anything; I was sure Tom had thought of that, too.

"LaPorte didn't say where he got the fencing, or how much he bought."

"No, he didn't." I watched some tiny minnows circling around one of the pilings.

"Somebody ought to try to find out," Tom said.

"Maybe somebody will."

He turned to leave. "That young Royce Call out there?"

"Yes."

"Ask him how he likes his new job."

"I was planning to."

Why would a wealthy man from Canada who had a summer home in the Adirondacks and who was afraid of sunburn be out in the lake trolling for fencing? He could hire somebody to do the work, or he might put in an insurance claim, or he could just take the loss and forget it.

LaPorte must smell money, lots of money. From his front windows he could look out at the lake and think about how valuable hardwood logs came to be under the water out there. About how just one log could be worth more than his new Mercedes sedan. Maybe he knew that extra-fine grain lumber is in constant demand all over the world. Maybe he'd found out that underwater salvage in Lake Superior is very, very successful. And there at the dock was his big party boat, large enough to hold winches, already equipped with fish finding gear. LaPorte talked to his wife, and they made plans.

Of course they would need one local person, someone who knew trees.

Thinking of money made me think of Martin Metcalf. I invited myself over to see him. In addition to being a millionaire Martin Metcalf is a rabid conservationist. He heads a conservation outfit called the Nature Trust that owns six thousand acres in the Five Ponds Wilderness Area. Their motto is:

*What the past has entrusted to us
let the future inherit from us.*

Metcalf and the Trust have a lot of clout in Albany. Last year they raised Cain with the Air National Guard for flying too low and disturbing nesting birds. That may sound trivial, but now the jets are prohibited from flying lower than two thousand feet.



Martin Metcalf is interested in everything from acid rain, which has already destroyed more than two hundred lakes in the Adirondacks, to the PCB content of striped bass. He's a big man, a casual dresser, completely bald, and has light blue eyes. He has a summer home near Franklin Falls built in the style of the old Great Camps. We sat in his study while I told him why I thought Edmund LaPorte was conducting a timber salvage operation that was illegal.

He didn't say a word, but at the end of my recital I saw him reach under his desk. I assume he pressed a button because a man holding a notebook entered immediately.

"Tell Roger Hill to fly the company plane up here in the morning," Metcalf said to him.

"Yes, sir." The man disappeared.

"I don't have any proof," I told Metcalf, "and the rangers don't have the manpower to watch him twenty-four hours a day. And it's possible LaPorte doesn't know the regulation about taking timber out of the park. I think it says timber cannot be removed, sold, or destroyed."

Metcalf looked at me with those light blue eyes. "He's got an angle," he said. "We'll try to find it."

He pushed the button again and the same secretary appeared. "Get a line on Edmund LaPorte, Montreal, local address Union Lake," he added a license number I had given him, then turned back to me. "Is the state really serious about this?"

I told him the story about one of the Adirondack ski centers. When the center got permission from the APA to build another trail, they had to take down a lot of trees. The center couldn't sell them or take them off the property.

"What did they do?" Metcalf asked.

"They've got enough firewood stacked up for the next hundred years," I told him.

The little birch had been deliberately cut so it would fall on my garage. Not on my house, on my garage. There was a larger pine a few feet away that could have been cut to fall on the roof of my kitchen and do considerably more damage.

I stood and looked at the stump of the birch and tried to think of what this meant. The tree had been cut skillfully with a chain saw: a deep V on the side of trunk where you want the tree to fall, a straight cut on the opposite side to meet the V, and the tree goes just where you want it to. It might have taken ten minutes.

I'd been gone all afternoon; there'd been time to cut down three or four larger trees, do a lot more damage, even set fire to the house. But that wasn't the purpose. I sat down on the porch. The idea wasn't to hurt me, it was to warn me. Somebody was saying, "Back off, Hank Sessions, back off."



There could be a connection between a little tree in my yard and the ancient logs at the bottom of a lake.

"And cherry! Hank, you wouldn't believe how much cherry I found yesterday. It's been cherry and maple and birch every day, not much pine at all." Royce's excitement was catching, even over the phone. I found myself wishing I could put on an air mask and walk on the bottom of the lake with him.

"Suzann taught me how to use an air hose and the other gear. I've got a hammer in my belt, see, and a bag of big screw eyes. I find a log with my light and I drive a screw eye into it and we hook on the air bag and that's all there is to it. We blow up the air bag, and I check out the log when it hits the surface. If it's a keeper, we swing it under the boat. We've got slings rigged up to hold four or so at a time. That's where the fence wire is. If LaPorte sees anybody coming, we do the number with the air bag and a roll of fence.

"Suzann is the brains of the outfit. What a babe she is! What's that, Hank? Oh, I'm stayin' at their house; she don't want me hangin' around town. Yeah, I'll try to let you know when they're goin' to move the logs, and where . . ."

A phone call from his secretary had me back in Martin Metcalf's study the next day. He handed me some eight by ten photos, aerial shots of the LaPorte property on the lake, considerably enlarged.

Metcalf grinned at the look on my face. "We've got a company plane," he explained, "may as well get some use out of it." He pointed at one photo. "Here's his dock and his boathouse. There are something like twenty-three logs in the shallow water there, roped together."

He showed me another picture. "And here behind the carport there's a truck under the trees. So LaPorte is bringing up logs and towing them here. The rolls of fence are a cover, a good cover."

Metcalf was enjoying himself. This was a break from his board meetings. He was ready to play cat and mouse, with the Canadian as the mouse. "LaPorte is a plunger," he told me. "He's got money, takes chances in real estate, stocks, you name it. This is his third wife."

There were two other people in the room. Metcalf had introduced them. One was Henry Cunningham, "chief of security at our Rochester plant"; the other was Roger Hill, a lawyer. "Roger assures me the regulation is still in force. Timber can't be taken out of the park, whether it's a tree on the stump or a log under water—without special permission, of course."

"Royce Call told me Suzann LaPorte claimed to have some paperwork taken care of," I said.

"Call? Who's he?"

"Just a hired hand," I said hastily. "He's not in on this." Suzann probably told Royce a big lie just to keep him from asking questions.



Hill, the lawyer, joined the conversation. "The logs are legally still in the lake, even under three inches of water there by the shore. He hasn't stolen anything yet."

"And hardwood has to stay wet," I told them. They all looked at me. "Insects will get at it when it dries," I explained. "The mills always cut it up wet. But there's a bigger problem here. Those logs have to stay in deep, cold water. Otherwise they'll begin to rot, to deteriorate."

"Why's that?" Hill asked.

"Because there's less oxygen in cold water," I answered. "I looked it up."

"All right," Metcalf said, "he's got a truck ready and he can load and leave any time he wants to."

"Yes," I said, "he can. Twenty logs is a small load, but a small load of these logs could be very valuable." I looked at the pictures again. "And we won't know when the truck leaves."

"Oh yes, we will." It was the chief of security. He showed me a small black metal box. "This is a radio transmitter. We can use its signal to track the truck."

"Great!" I said. "But how will you get it on the truck?"

Cunningham and Metcalf looked at each other and grinned. "One like this is already in place," Cunningham told me. "On the frame by the rear axle." I didn't ask the question, but he answered it anyway. "It was dark last night," he said simply. "I took a drive."

"Where do you think LaPorte will go?" Metcalf asked me.

"Canada or Vermont," I answered. "Canada, most likely. He'll have to have a purchase order from a mill in Quebec to get the logs across the border, but I'm sure he'll have that arranged."

Metcalf turned to the lawyer. "What do you think, Roger?"

Hill shook his head. "He'll be in violation as soon as he leaves the Blue Line, the Adirondack Park. You might want to have the police put up a road block on Route 30 this side of Malone."

"Too risky," I said. "Too many other routes, too many back roads. And LaPorte may make a run for it; he'll know the loaded truck will be evidence enough of intent to remove and sell. As soon as they're rolling, those logs become a new kind of contraband."

"Hank Sessions? This is Pete Dupree at the Blue Ax. Royce Call was in and asked me to phone you. Said to tell you he's gettin' loaded tonight. He only had one beer, and he looked all right to me when he left. Maybe he's goin' to a party . . ."

"Thanks, Pete."

We assembled at Metcalf's house. Tom and I arrived at the same time; Hill and Cunningham were already there. Metcalf was excited; this was more fun than taking over a rival company.

"If he loads that truck tonight, he'll be pulling out in the morning."



Where do you guys think we should stop him? Before he leaves his place or outside the park?"

"I don't have any authority outside the park," Tom said.

"He's already in violation," Hill said, "just removing the logs from the lake. And if the truck heads north, to Canada, that will show intent to sell. I think."

We agreed to let LaPorte take the truck out of the Union Lake development but stop him before he left the park. Metcalf told Cunningham, the security man, to keep somebody on his radio and to make sure the state police were tuned in. I reminded everyone that Royce Call was just a hired hand. "All right, fellows," Metcalf said jovially. "I had cots set up in the pool room. There are sandwiches in the bar. Now, who's for a little five card stud?"

I got Metcalf aside before the game began. "Martin," I said, "we haven't got enough ammunition to stop LaPorte. Tom can read him the 'forever wild' bit in the constitution, but I don't think that's enough. LaPorte probably knows that by heart."

"I'll have Roger hit him with an injunction."

"Then his receiving mill in Quebec will countersue. Interference with delivery, restraint of trade, or something. You're a big target, Martin."

He bristled. "I've been sued before."

"But in the meantime the timber begins to decay." I shook my head. "We need a plan B."

"You got any ideas?"

"I'm working on it."

A private road serves the wealthy homes around Union Lake and connects with a two-lane county road that runs east to the airport and north to the border. We planned to intercept the truck at the junction of the county road. Our roadblock was one car with the DEC insignia on the door. Two other cars were parked discreetly nearby.

It was a good spot to wait. There were cornfields on both sides, and the road was straight; we could see the truck coming some distance away.

It was early and the eastern sky was dark and lined with thin streaks of cirrus. I watched the sun rise, one ribbon at a time, as the poet said, turning each cloud from gray to orange.

"Showtime," someone said.

The truck was coming. In a moment we could see Royce Call at the wheel with LaPorte on the seat beside him. The Mercedes followed, Suzann driving.

Tom stepped out in the center of the road and held up his hand. Obeyingly the vehicles stopped. "You're under arrest, Mr. LaPorte," Tom said evenly. "Get out of the truck, please."

LaPorte stepped down from the driver's seat. "What seems to be the trouble, officer?" he asked in a mocking, patronizing tone.



"Those logs came out of Union Lake . . ." Tom began.

"Aha! You're going to quote Article Fifteen of the Environmental Conservation Law to me. Well, officer, I did not disturb the banks or the bed of that lake. Nor did I interfere with the aquatic life or disrupt the current. And you can't prove that I did." He gave a little chuckle.

"Not that, Mr. LaPorte," Tom said stubbornly. "These logs came from the New York State Forest Preserve, and it's illegal to . . ."

"Oh, but they didn't, officer." LaPorte looked around at Metcalf and Hill and me standing some feet away. He must have recognized Martin Metcalf because he gave him a little wave. "These logs came from far upstream of what is now known as Union River, from a forest well outside the limits of your authority."

"No," Tom said, "no, they didn't . . ."

That was what LaPorte had been waiting for. He stepped close to Tom. "Prove it! Prove these logs didn't come from trees beyond your precious Blue Line!"

It was an audacious claim to make. The park was created in 1885 and is identified with a blue line on maps. Of course forests were being cut before that date, and rivers were being used for logging and commerce.

LaPorte smiled insolently at Metcalf. "You can't prove it, can you, Mr. Millionaire?" He turned back to Tom. "How far can a log float in a hundred years, officer? These logs were abandoned, and they're mine now. Finders, keepers, you know." He started to climb back into the truck.

I looked at Whiteface off in the distance, the summit glinting in the early morning sun. Unless I did something, LaPorte was going to drive away with a load of very valuable logs that didn't belong to him. I nudged Metcalf. "Time for Plan B."

In a loud voice I said, "Wait a minute!"

LaPorte gave me an irritated look. "What do you want?"

I didn't answer him. From a pocket I produced a small magnifying glass I use to look up telephone numbers. I went around and climbed over the rear wheel to reach the logs. They were wet and splotted in places with green algae. The bark was dark and streaked with sand and dirt.

With my knife I pried up pieces of bark and examined the wood underneath with my glass. Every now and then I shook my head as if I didn't like what I saw.

Everybody there knew I had been a peace officer. But I could have studied entomology in my spare time, couldn't I? Right now I wanted them to think I knew a hell of a lot about insects.

From what Royce had said, I could be looking at what had been black cherry or maple trees. Trees that might have been saplings when Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold took Ticonderoga away from the British in 1775. Mature trees when the big iron ore beds were found at the head of the Hudson River in 1825.

Everybody was watching me; nobody said anything. I looked back and



saw Suzann LaPorte sitting behind the wheel of their car. I started to wave but thought better of it. Finally I crawled down and went back to the front of the truck.

"Just what I was afraid of," I told Metcalf. "These logs are infested with the eggs and larvae of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid." I shook my head. "A most destructive insect and still on the quarantine list in New York." Don't ask me how I happened to remember the name of that little bug.

LaPorte was white with anger. "You're crazy . . ."

"The truck will have to be impounded," I went on, "and the load will have to be confiscated."

"What's going on here?" LaPorte was raging. He turned to Metcalf. "What are you trying to pull, Mr. Millionaire? There's absolutely nothing wrong with those logs!"

Metcalf stepped forward. "Then prove it, sir, prove it!" He gave me a nod and a quick grin. "If you believe our expert is incorrect, send some specimens to the Agriculture Department at Cornell University. I'm sure they'll accommodate you. For a fee, of course, and it may take a few weeks.

"Meanwhile, you are in violation for transporting endangered material without a permit." He waved at Tom. "Officer, write this man an appearance ticket." He gave LaPorte a broad smile. "That's a civil court summons," he explained.

Edmund LaPorte was a gambler. Win or lose on the turn of a card; prolonged litigation was not his style. He had bet time and money on a preposterous claim. Now his bluff had been countered by another bluff.

"That won't be necessary, officer," he said to Tom. He took a briefcase off the seat of the truck, walked back, and got in the Mercedes beside Suzann. She gunned the motor as she steered the car onto the shoulder to get past the truck and our cars. As she drove by, she glanced at us and raised the middle finger of her right hand. We watched as the LaPortes disappeared toward Canada.

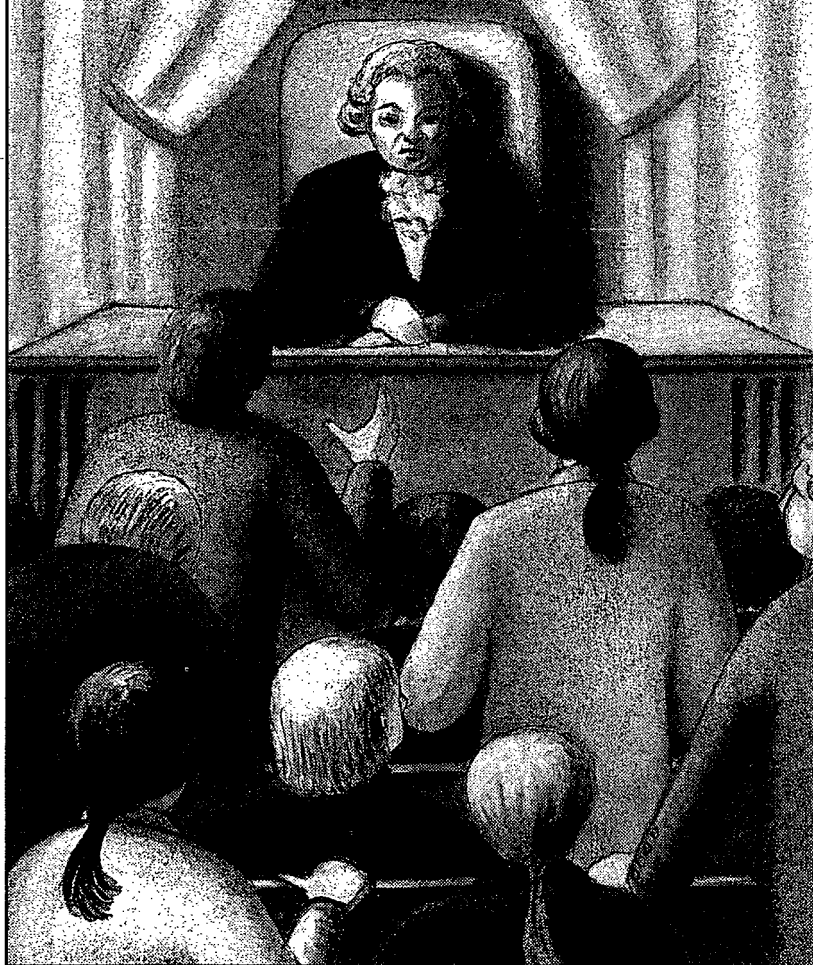
Metcalf had his lawyer settle the charges against Royce, and Royce went to work with the Nature Trust as a preserve steward. A few days later he called me. "I'm sorry about the little tree, Hank. It was Suzann's idea. She said it was supposed to scare you off. Anyway, I'm sorry, and I'm glad it didn't work . . ."

Tom and I and some rangers put the logs back in the lake. Deep, where the water's coldest. We didn't tell anybody the location. Too many treasure hunters around these days.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

NABOTH'S VINEYARD

Melville Davisson Post



One hears a good deal about the sovereignty of the people in this republic; and many persons imagine it a sort of fiction, and wonder where it lies, who are the guardians of it, and how they would exercise it if the forms and agents of the law were removed. I am not one of those who speculate upon this mystery, for I have seen this primal ultimate authority naked at its work. And having seen it, I know how mighty and how dread a thing it is. And I know where it lies, and who are the guardians of it, and how they exercise it when the need arises.

There was a great crowd, for the whole country was in the courtroom. It was a notorious trial.

Elihu Marsh had been shot down in his house. He had been found lying in a room with a hole through his body that one could put his thumb in. He was an irascible old man, the last of his family, and so lived alone. He had rich lands but only a life estate in them; the remainder was to some foreign heirs. A girl from a neighboring farm came now and then to bake and put his house in order, and he kept a farmhand about the premises.

Nothing had been disturbed in the house when the neighbors found Marsh; no robbery had been attempted, for the man's money, a considerable sum, remained on him.

There was not much mystery about the thing because the farmhand had disappeared. This man was a stranger in the hills. He had come from over the mountains some months before and gone to work for Marsh. He was a big blond man, young and goodlooking; of better blood, one would say, than the average laborer. He gave his name as Taylor, but he was not communicative and little else about him was known.

The country was raised, and this man was overtaken in the foothills of the mountains. He had his clothes tied into a bundle and a long-barreled fowling piece on his shoulder. The story he told was that he and Marsh had settled that morning and he had left the house at noon, but that he had forgotten his gun and had gone back for it, had reached the house about four o'clock, gone into the kitchen, got his gun down from the dogwood forks over the chimney, and at once left the house. He had not seen Marsh and did not know where he was.

He admitted that this gun had been loaded with a single huge lead bullet. He had so loaded it to kill a dog that sometimes approached the house but not close enough to be reached with a load of shot. He affected surprise when it was pointed out that the gun had been discharged. He said that he had not fired it and had not, until then, noticed that it was empty. When asked why he had so suddenly determined to leave the country, he was silent.

He was carried back and confined in the county jail, and now he was on trial at the September term of the circuit court.

The court sat early. Although the judge, Simon Kilrail, was a landowner and lived on his estate in the country some half dozen miles away, he rode to the courthouse in the morning, and home at night, with his legal papers in his saddle pockets. It was only when the court sat that he was a lawyer. At other times he harvested his hay and grazed his cattle and tried to add to his lands like any other man in the hills, and he was as hard in a trade and as hungry for an acre as any.

It was the sign and insignia of distinction in Virginia to own land. Mr. Jefferson had annulled the titles that George the Third had granted, and the land alone remained as a patent of nobility. The judge wished to be one of these landed gentry, and he had gone a good way to accomplish it. But when the court convened, he became a lawyer and sat upon the bench with no heart in him and a cruel tongue like the English judges.

I think everybody was at this trial. My Uncle Abner and the strange old doctor, Storm, sat on a bench near the center aisle of the courtroom, and I sat behind them, for I was a half grown lad and permitted to witness the terrors and severities of the law.

The prisoner was the center of interest. He sat with a stolid countenance like a man careless of the issues of life. But not everybody was concerned with him, for my Uncle Abner and Storm watched the girl who had been accustomed to bake for Marsh and red up his house.

She was a beauty of her type: dark-haired and dark-eyed like a gypsy and with an April nature of storm and sun. She sat among the witnesses with a little handkerchief clutched in her hands. She was nervous to the point of hysteria, and I thought that was the reason the old doctor watched her. She would be taken with a gust of tears and then throw up her head with a fine defiance, and she kneaded and knotted and worked the handkerchief in her fingers. It was a time of stress and many witnesses were unnerved, and I think I should not have noticed this girl but for the whispering of Storm and my Uncle Abner.

The trial went forward, and it became certain that the prisoner would hang. His stubborn refusal to give any reason for his hurried departure had but one meaning, and the circumstantial evidence was conclusive. The motive only remained in doubt, and the judge had charged on this with so many cases in point, and with so heavy a hand, that any virtue in it was removed. The judge was hard against this man, and indeed there was little sympathy anywhere, for it was a foul killing—the victim an old man and no hot blood to excuse it.

In all trials of great public interest, where the evidences of guilt overwhelmingly assemble against a prisoner, there comes a moment when all the people in the courtroom, as one man and without a sign of the

common purpose, agree upon a verdict; there is no outward or visible evidence of this decision, but one feels it and it is a moment of the tensest stress.

The trial of Taylor had reached this point, and there lay a moment of deep silence, when this girl sitting among the witnesses suddenly burst into a very hysteria of tears. She stood up shaking with sobs, her voice choking in her throat and the tears gushing through her fingers.

What she said was not heard at the time by the audience in the courtroom, but it brought the judge to his feet and the jury crowding about her, and it broke down the silence of the prisoner and threw him into a perfect fury of denials. We could hear his voice rise above the confusion, and we could see him struggling to get to the girl and stop her. But what she said was presently known to everybody, for it was taken down and signed, and it put the case against Taylor, to use a lawyer's term, out of court.

The girl had killed Marsh herself. And this was the manner and the reason of it: She and Taylor were sweethearts and were to be married. But they had quarreled the night before Marsh's death, and the following morning Taylor had left the country. The point of the quarrel was some remark that Marsh had made to Taylor touching the girl's reputation. She had come to the house in the afternoon and, finding her lover gone, and maddened at the sight of the one who had robbed her of him, had taken the gun down from the chimney and killed Marsh. She had then put the gun back into its place and left the house. This was about two o'clock in the afternoon and about an hour before Taylor returned for his gun.

There was a great veer of public feeling with a profound sense of having come at last upon the truth, for the story not only fitted to the circumstantial evidence against Taylor, but it fitted also to his story and it disclosed the motive for the killing. It explained, too, why he had refused to give the reason for his disappearance. That Taylor denied what the girl said and tried to stop her in her declaration meant nothing except that the prisoner was a man and would not have the woman he loved make such a sacrifice for him.

I cannot give all the forms of legal procedure with which the closing hours of the court were taken up, but nothing happened to shake the girl's confession. Whatever the law required was speedily got ready, and she was remanded to the care of the sheriff in order that she might come before the court in the morning.

Taylor was not released but was also held in custody although the case against him seemed utterly broken down. The judge refused to permit the prisoner's counsel to take a verdict. He said that he would withdraw a juror and continue the case. But he seemed unwilling to release any clutch of the law until someone was punished for this crime.

It was on our way, and we rode out with the judge that night. He talked with Abner and Storm about the pastures and the price of cattle, but not about the trial as I hoped he would do except once only, and then it was to inquire why the prosecuting attorney had not called either of them as witnesses, since they were the first to find Marsh, and Storm had been among the doctors who examined him. And Storm had explained how he had mortally offended the prosecutor in his canvass by his remark that only a gentleman should hold office. He did but quote Mr. Hamilton, Storm said, but the man had received it as a deadly insult, and thereby proved the truth of Mr. Hamilton's expression, Storm added. And Abner said that as no circumstance about Marsh's death was questioned, and others arriving about the same time had been called, the prosecutor doubtless considered further testimony unnecessary.

The judge nodded, and the conversation turned to other questions. At the gates after the common, formal courtesy of the country, the judge asked us to ride in, and to my astonishment, Abner and Storm accepted his invitation. I could see that the man was surprised, and I thought annoyed, but he took us into his library.

I could not understand why Abner and Storm had stopped here until I remembered how from the first they had been considering the girl, and it occurred to me that they thus sought the judge in the hope of getting some word to him in her favor. A great sentiment had leaped up for this girl. She had made a staggering sacrifice, and with a headlong courage, and it was like these men to help her if they could.

And it was to speak of the woman that they came, but not in her favor. And while Simon Kilrail listened, they told this extraordinary story: They had been of the opinion that Taylor was not guilty when the trial began, but they had suffered it to proceed in order to see what might develop. The reason was that there were certain circumstantial evidences, overlooked by the prosecutor, indicating the guilt of the woman and the innocence of Taylor. When Storm examined the body of Marsh, he discovered that the man had been killed by poison and was dead when the bullet was fired into his body. This meant that the shooting was a fabricated evidence to direct suspicion against Taylor. The woman had baked for Marsh on this morning, and the poison was in the bread which he had eaten at noon.

Abner was going on to explain something further when a servant entered and asked the judge what time it was. The man had been greatly impressed, and he now sat in a profound reflection. He took his watch out of his pocket and held it in his hand; then he seemed to realize the question and replied that his watch had run down. Abner gave the hour and said that perhaps his key would wind the watch. The judge gave it to him, and he wound it and laid it on the table. Storm observed my un-

cle with what I thought a curious interest, but the judge paid no attention. He was deep in his reflection and oblivious to everything. Finally he roused himself and made his comment.

"This clears the matter up," he said. "The woman killed Marsh from the motive which she gave in her confession, and she created this false evidence against Taylor because he had abandoned her. She thereby avenged herself desperately in two directions. . . . It would be like a woman to do this and then regret it and confess."

He then asked my uncle if he had anything further to tell him, and although I was sure that Abner was going on to say something further when the servant entered, he replied now that he had not, and asked for the horses. The judge went out to have the horses brought, and we remained in silence. My uncle was calm, as with some consuming idea, but Storm was as nervous as a cat. He was out of his chair when the door was closed and hopping about the room looking at the law books standing on the shelves in their leather covers. Suddenly he stopped and plucked out a little volume. He whipped through it with his forefinger, smothered a great oath, and shot it into his pocket; then he crooked his finger to my uncle, and they talked together in a recess of the window until the judge returned.

We rode away. I was sure that they intended to say something to the judge in the woman's favor, for guilty or not, it was a fine thing she had done to stand up and confess. But something in the interview had changed their purpose. Perhaps when they had heard the judge's comment they saw it would be of no use. They talked closely together as they rode, but they kept before me and I could not hear. It was of the woman they spoke, however, for I caught a fragment.

"But where is the motive?" said Storm.

And my uncle answered, "In the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Kings."

We were early at the county seat, and it was a good thing for us because the courtroom was crowded to the doors. My uncle had got a big record book out of the county clerk's office as he came in, and I was glad of it, for he gave it to me to sit on, and it raised me up so I could see. Storm was there, too, and, in fact, every man of any standing in the county.

The sheriff opened the court, the prisoners were brought in, and the judge took his seat on the bench. He looked haggard like a man who had not slept, as, in fact, one could hardly have done who had so cruel a duty before him. Here was every human feeling pressing to save a woman, and the law to hang her. But for all his hag-ridden face, when he came to act, the man was adamant.

He ordered the confession read and directed the girl to stand up. Taylor tried again to protest, but he was forced down into his chair. The girl

stood up bravely, but she was white as plaster and her eyes dilated. She was asked if she still adhered to the confession and understood the consequences of it, and although she trembled from head to toe, she spoke out distinctly. There was a moment of silence and the judge was about to speak when another voice filled the courtroom. I turned about on my book to find my head against my Uncle Abner's legs.

"I challenge the confession!" he said.

The whole courtroom moved. Every eye was on the two tragic figures standing up: the slim, pale girl and the big, somber figure of my uncle. The judge was astounded.

"On what ground?" he said.

"On the ground," replied my uncle, "that the confession is a lie!"

One could have heard a pin fall anywhere in the whole room. The girl caught her breath in a little gasp, and the prisoner, Taylor, half rose and then sat down as though his knees were too weak to bear him. The judge's mouth opened, but for a moment or two he did not speak and I could understand his amazement. Here was Abner assailing a confession which he himself had supported before the judge, and speaking for the innocence of a woman whom he himself had shown to be guilty and taking one position privately and another publicly. What did the man mean? And I was not surprised that the judge's voice was stern when he spoke.

"This is irregular," he said. "It may be that this woman killed Marsh, or it may be that Taylor killed him, and there is some collusion between these persons as you appear to suggest. And you may know something to throw light on the matter or you may not. However that may be, this is not the time for me to hear you. You will have ample opportunity to speak when I come to try the case."

"But you will never try this case!" said Abner.

I cannot undertake to describe the desperate interest that lay on the people in the courtroom. They were breathlessly silent; one could hear the voices from the village outside and the sounds of men and horses that came up through the open windows. No one knew what hidden thing Abner drove at. But he was a man who meant what he said, and the people knew it.

The judge turned on him with a terrible face.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"I mean," replied Abner, and it was in his deep, hard voice, "that you must come down from the bench."

The judge was in a heat of fury.

"You are in contempt," he roared. "I order your arrest. Sheriff!" he called.

But Abner did not move. He looked the man calmly in the face.

"You threaten me," he said, "but God Almighty threatens you." And

he turned about to the audience. "The authority of the law," he said, "is in the hands of the electors of this county. Will they stand up?"

I shall never forget what happened then, for I have never in my life seen anything so deliberate and impressive. Slowly, in silence, and without passion, as though they were in a church of God, men began to get up in the courtroom.

Randolph was the first. He was a justice of the peace, vain and pompous, proud of the abilities of an ancestry that he did not inherit. And his superficialities were the annoyance of my Uncle Abner's life. But whatever I may have to say of him hereafter, I want to say this thing of him here, that his bigotry and his vanities were builded on the foundations of a man. He stood up as though he stood alone, with no glance about him to see what other men would do, and he faced the judge calmly above his great black stock. And I learned then that a man may be a blusterer and a lion.

Hiram Arnold got up, and Rockford, and Armstrong, and Alkire, and Coopman, and Monroe, and Elnathan Stone, and my father, Lewis, and Dayton and Ward, and Madison from beyond the mountains. And it seemed to me that the very hills and valleys were standing up.

It was a strange and instructive thing to see. The loud-mouthed and the reckless were in that courtroom, men who would have shouted in a political convention, or run howling with a mob, but they were not the persons who stood up when Abner called upon the authority of the people to appear. Men rose whom one would not have looked to see—the blacksmith, the saddler, and old Asa Divers. And I saw that law and order and all the structure that civilization had builded up rested on the sense of justice that certain men carried in their breasts, and that those who possessed it not, in the crisis of necessity, did not count.

Father Donovan stood up; he had a little flock beyond the valley river, and he was as poor and almost as humble as his Master, but he was not afraid; and Bronson, who preached Calvin, and Adam Rider, who traveled a Methodist circuit. No one of them believed in what the other taught, but they all believed in justice, and when the line was drawn, there was but one side for them all.

The last man up was Nathaniel Davisson, but the reason was that he was very old and he had to wait for his sons to help him. He had been time and again in the Assembly of Virginia, at a time when only a gentleman and landowner could sit there. He was a just man, and honorable and unafraid.

The judge, his face purple, made a desperate effort to enforce his authority. He pounded on his desk and ordered the sheriff to clear the courtroom. But the sheriff remained standing apart. He did not lack for courage, and I think he would have faced the people if his duty had been that way. His attitude was firm, and one could mark no uncertainty

upon him, but he took no step to obey what the judge commanded.

The judge cried out at him in a terrible voice.

"I am the representative of the law here. Go on!"

The sheriff was a plain man, and unacquainted with the nice expressions of Mr. Jefferson, but his answer could not have been better if that gentleman had written it out for him.

"I would obey the representative of the law," he said, "if I were not in the presence of the law itself!"

The judge rose. "This is revolution," he said; "I will send to the governor for the militia."

It was Nathaniel Davisson who spoke then. He was very old and the tremors of dissolution were on him, but his voice was steady.

"Sit down, Your Honor," he said, "there is no revolution here, and you do not require troops to support your authority. We are here to support it if it ought to be lawfully enforced. But the people have elevated you to the Bench because they believed in your integrity, and if they have been mistaken, they would know it." He paused as though to collect his strength and then went on. "The presumptions of right are all with Your Honor. You administer the law upon our authority, and we stand behind you. Be assured that we will not suffer our authority to be insulted in your person." His voice grew deep and resolute. "It is a grave thing to call us up against you, and not lightly nor for a trivial reason shall any man dare to do it." Then he turned about. "Now, Abner," he said, "what is this thing?"

Young as I was, I felt that the old man spoke for the people standing in the courtroom, with their voice and their authority, and I began to fear that the measure which my uncle had taken was high-handed. But he stood there like the shadow of a great rock.

"I charge him," he said, "with the murder of Elihu Marsh! And I call upon him to vacate the Bench."

When I think about this extraordinary event now, I wonder at the calmness with which Simon Kilrail met this blow until I reflect that he had seen it on its way and had got ready to meet it. But even with that preparation it took a man of iron nerve to face an assault like that and keep every muscle in its place. He had tried violence and had failed with it, and he had recourse now to the attitudes and mannerisms of a judicial dignity. He sat with his elbows on the table and his clenched fingers propping up his jaw. He looked coldly at Abner, but he did not speak, and there was silence until Nathaniel Davisson spoke for him. His face and his voice were like iron.

"No, Abner," he said, "he shall not vacate the Bench for that, nor upon the accusation of any man. We will have your proofs if you please."

The judge turned his cold face from Abner to Nathaniel Davisson, and then he looked over the men standing in the courtroom.

"I am not going to remain here," he said, "to be tried by a mob upon the *viva voce* indictment of a bystander. You may nullify your court if you like and suspend the forms of law for yourselves, but you cannot nullify the constitution of Virginia nor suspend my right as a citizen of that commonwealth.

"And now," he said, rising, "if you will kindly make way, I will vacate this courtroom; which your violence has converted into a chamber of sedition."

The man spoke in a cold, even voice, and I thought he had presented a difficulty that could not be met. How could these men before him undertake to keep the peace of this frontier and force its lawless elements to submit to the forms of law for trial and deny any letter of those formalities to this man? Was the grand jury and the formal indictment and all the right and privilege of an orderly procedure for one and not for another?

It was Nathaniel Davisson who met this dangerous problem.

"We are not concerned," he said, "at this moment with your rights as a citizen; the rights of private citizenship are inviolate, and they remain to you when you return to it. But you are not a private citizen. You are our agent. We have selected you to administer the law for us, and your right to act has been challenged. Well, as the authority behind you, we appear and would know the reason."

The judge retained his imperturbable calm.

"Do you hold me a prisoner here?" he said.

"We hold you an official in your office," replied Davisson; "not only do we refuse to permit you to leave the courtroom, but we refuse to permit you to leave the Bench. This court shall remain as we have set it up until it is our will to readjust it. And it shall not be changed at the pleasure or demand of any man but by us only, and for a sufficient cause shown to us."

And again I was anxious for my uncle, for I saw how grave a thing it was to interfere with the authority of the people as manifested in the forms and agencies of the law. Abner must be very sure of the ground under him.

And he was sure. He spoke now, with no introductory expressions, but directly and in the simplest words.

"These two persons," he said, indicating Taylor and the girl, "have each been willing to die in order to save the other. Neither is guilty of this crime. Taylor has kept silent, and the girl has lied, to the same end. This is the truth: There was a lovers' quarrel, and Taylor left the country precisely as he told us, except the motive, which he would not tell lest the girl be involved. And the woman, to save him, confesses to a crime that she did not commit.

"Who did commit it?" He paused and included Storm with a gesture.

"We suspected this woman because Marsh had been killed by poison in his bread and afterwards mutilated with a shot. Yesterday we rode out with the judge to put those facts before him." Again he paused. "An incident occurring in that interview indicated that we were wrong; a second incident assured us, and still later a third convinced us. These incidents were, first, that the judge's watch had run down; second, that we found in his library a book with all the leaves in it uncut, except at one certain page; and, third, that we found in the county clerk's office an unindexed record in an old deedbook." There was deep quiet, and he went on:

"In addition to the theory of Taylor's guilt or this woman's, there was still a third, but it had only a single incident to support it and we feared to suggest it until the others had been explained. This theory was that someone, to benefit by Marsh's death, had planned to kill him in such a manner as to throw suspicion on this woman who baked his bread, and finding Taylor gone, and the gun above the mantel, yielded to an afterthought to create a further false evidence. It was overdone!

"The trigger guard of the gun in the recoil caught in the chain of the assassin's watch and jerked it out of his pocket; he replaced the watch but not the key, which fell to the floor and which I picked up beside the body of the dead man."

Abner turned toward the judge.

"And so," he said, "I charge Simon Kilrail with this murder because the key winds his watch; because the record in the old deedbook is a conveyance by the heirs of Marsh's lands to him at the life tenant's death; and because the book we found in his library is a book on poisons with the leaves uncut except at the very page describing that identical poison with which Elihu Marsh was murdered."

The strained silence that followed Abner's words was broken by a voice that thundered in the courtroom. It was Randolph's.

"Come down!" he said.

And this time Nathaniel Davisson was silent.

The judge got slowly on his feet; a resolution was forming in his face, and it advanced swiftly.

"I will give you my answer in a moment," he said.

Then he turned about and went into his room behind the Bench. There was but one door and that opening into the courts, and the people waited.

The windows were open, and we could see the green fields and the sun and the far-off mountains, and the peace and quiet and serenity of autumn entered. The judge did not appear. Presently there was the sound of a shot from behind the closed door. The sheriff threw it open, and upon the floor, sprawling in a smear of blood, lay Simon Kilrail, with a dueling pistol in his hand.

BOOKED & PRINTED

Mary Cannon



Ed McBain's latest 87th Precinct novel, **The Last Dance** (Simon & Schuster, \$25), is a treat. Not only do you get McBain's Gotham setting, familiar characters from the old gang, and the staccato dialogue that is McBain's trademark style, you also get a gander behind the scenes of an upcoming Broadway production. We're not talking about building the sets here, but rather the legal ins and outs of obtaining rights to an original play that ran for a single week on Broadway back in 1922. By the novel's end, McBain has connected several murders that seem impossibly divergent, as well as introduced a delightfully venal group of prospective heirs to what may turn out to be a windfall worth millions—all in several days' work for the men and women of the 87th Precinct.

Laurie King is the author of the acclaimed historical series that picked up the story of Sherlock Holmes in his retirement, then gave the great detective a smart young feminist sidekick. King also pens praise-worthy thrillers featuring San Francisco cop Kate Martinelli and her partner Al Hawkin, and they are the ones who team up to find the perpetrators in her latest book, **Night Work** (Bantam, \$23.95). A group calling itself The Ladies of Perpetual Disgruntlement has struck several times in recent months, each time targeting a man whom the law has been unable to touch (a child molester, a wife beater, a porno dealer acquitted of statutory rape) and setting him up as an object of public humiliation. This time, though, their evidence isn't found on a disgraced but unharmed victim, but on a corpse. For Kate, a lesbian and feminist, this means that the investigation could lead to someone uncomfortably close to home. King adds several other compelling threads to this tapestry as well, giving readers an ultimately rich and satisfying thriller.

Steve Hamilton's first novel won him an Edgar. He follows up that promising debut with an equally strong work titled **Winter of the Wolf Moon** (St. Martin/Minotaur, \$23.95). Former cop and "former"

private eye Alex McKnight is reluctant to aid a young Native American woman who shows up on his doorstep with a plea for help. It's winter-time in Paradise, the small community in Michigan's Upper Peninsula where McKnight lives, and that demands a measure of vigilance to keep his cabin and nearby rental properties clear of the ever-falling snow. But before Alex can think up a convincing reason to refuse his hopeful client, he finds himself in the middle of a war between several deadly factions all eager to locate her. A tough but engaging narrator, credible local characters, and action scenes that exploit the isolated, wintry locale add up to a book that's difficult to put down.

Anne Perry sends her Victorian policeman Thomas Pitt out to solve a murder in **Half Moon Street** (Ballantine, \$25): the corpse of a fashionable, successful young photographer has been "displayed," dressed up in woman's garb and laid out in a small boat in the Thames. Clearly the killer ran a great risk going to such lengths to dishonor a dead man, which leads Pitt to believe that the odd manner of the body's disposal is his best clue to the culprit. His wife Charlotte is on her first trip out of town since their wedding, so he must turn to his priggish and provincial junior, Tellman, for his meeting of minds. Pitt's case provides him with an introduction to Oscar Wilde, a peek into the French embassy, a study of the new craze of photography and those who were elevating it to an art, and several interrogations behind the curtains with members of a classical theater troupe. This is Perry's twentieth return to the society figures and posh neighborhoods of Victorian London—and she manages to make each visit as fresh for her reader as the first book in the series. As always, Perry's newest is great fun.

Margaret Frazer continues her estimable Sister Frevisse series with a fine foray back to medieval England in **The Reeve's Tale** (Berkley Prime Crime, \$21.95). The year is 1440 and it's almost haying time for St. Frideswide, the priory where Sister Frevisse lives. As theirs is a small cloistered nunnery, Master Naylor acts for them as overseer and representative of the priory's interests in the local courts. But someone has accused Naylor of being a runaway villein (and thus owned by a lord), and he is placed under house arrest. Much to Frevisse's dismay, her new superior appoints her to assume Naylor's duties until his name is cleared. Worse, there is definitely a killer on the loose, and Frevisse begins to suspect that everything that is going wrong is somehow connected. Being out in the world is definitely not her choosing, but Frevisse was raised in wealth and is well educated. She's also perceptive, quick-witted, fair-minded, and ever curious. Once again the combination will give her a winning edge in the battle between good and evil. Fully drawn characters, a jigsaw puzzle plot, and a fine eye for the details of daily life in this period all add up to a first-rate read.

In his newest thriller, **False Memory** (Bantam, \$26.95), Dean Koontz provides some terrifying moments as well as a psychopathic vil-

lain who, by novel's end, is clearly Hannibal Lecter's equal in evil. The novel centers around Martie Rhodes and her devoted husband, Dustin. For months now Martie has been patiently and faithfully supportive of her college friend Susan, who's been stricken with a crippling case of agoraphobia. Martie is the one who shuttles Susan to the frequent sessions with her psychiatrist. This unwittingly places her on the board of a very deadly player, however. Koontz's antagonist is close to fantastic in his brilliance, sadism, and gleeful gameplaying. This creep is also backed by a powerful secret organization that uses his skills and potions to implant memories and manipulate people. On the other team we have a young couple with no power and few allies. Even so, Martie and Dustin prove to be marvelously resourceful, resilient, and courageous. No question that this is an exciting premise, but Koontz has also included more than this reader ever wanted to know about the villain's self-delusions, past misdeeds, inner thoughts, home decor, and smug opinions on everything from wine to women's makeup.

SOLUTION TO THE APRIL "UNSOLVED":

Annette O'Hara killed Emile Matisse.

FLOOR	NAME	FROM	COVER
6	Dominic Quimby	Rome	doctor
5	Emile Matisse	Lisbon	artist
4	Catrina Randall	Paris	financier
3	Frederico Norquist	Edinburgh	banker
2	Annette O'Hara	Vienna	contractor
1	Beatrice Parker	Madrid	engineer

THE STORY THAT WON

The December Mysterious Photograph contest was won by Steve Plummer of Wichita, Kansas. Honorable mentions go to Victor P. Dufault of Noank, Connecticut; J. F. Peirce of Bryan, Texas; Mark Truman of Tustin, California; Manassas, Virginia.



Frank Peirce of College Station, Texas; Vicki A. Daly of Burlington, Ontario, Canada; Kevin N. Haw of Fullerton, California; Phil Dean of Arlington, Virginia; and Elizabeth McEntee of

Photo by Rolan Fajardo

ANY PORT IN A STORM by Steve Plummer

I'd just finished replacing a solar panel when the man boarded my cabin cruiser carrying a .44 Magnum and wearing an orange JAIL jumpsuit. I was looking at Dr. Jubal Liggins, accused murderer and escapee.

"Let's go," he said, gesturing toward the starter switch with the gun.

The solar storage batteries were not fully charged, but the starter finally turned over the engine. Even though it was nearly dark and the Coast Guard had issued small craft warnings, I hesitantly guided the *Sol-ution I* out to sea.

"This storm is going to swamp us," I told him when the rain began pelting us in a straight line. "We better turn back or find shelter of some kind."

"Keep moving," he said.

The fading lights and monstrous waves convinced my passenger that I was right. "I know a marina where we can go," I said.

"Just do it," he said, obviously seasick.

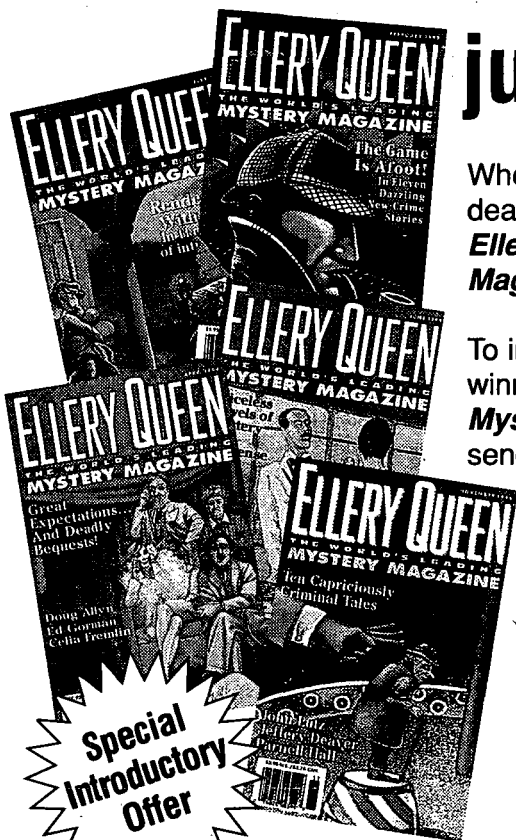
Visibility was close to zero when the rain suddenly stopped and our lights flickered and died. I dropped anchor. "We can wait out the storm and let the sun recharge the batteries in the morning."

For now, though, total darkness blanketed us. Suddenly a loudspeaker blared: "Come on deck with your hands up."

I had found shelter under the overhanging deck of the U.S.S. *Priapus*, a carrier in drydock for refitting. Two Coast Guardsmen boarded and disarmed my passenger, who had belatedly discovered why it was so dry and dark in my safe harbor.

5

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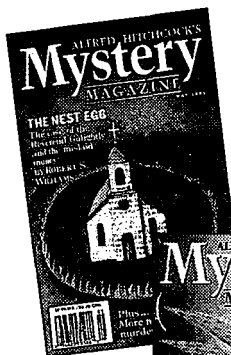
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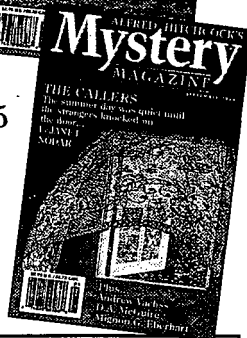
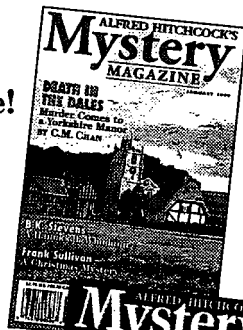
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Breakthrough dieting technique uses metabolic enhancers so you can lose unwanted pounds—in just six days!

by Anne Regalia

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This wisdom led to the development of the Six-Day BioDiet, a program of fruit and vegetable juice meals and metabolic enhancers that cleanse impurities from your body and take off up to 14 pounds in six days!

All-natural. Fruit and vegetable juices and teas are carefully selected for freshness, purity and nutritional value. This unique blend of nature's best ingredients provides the cleansing effects that put your body on the fast track to improved health and weight loss.

The juice cocktails are specially-packaged to guarantee freshness and convenience. Not only are the individual servings small enough to carry along on any busy schedule, they are packaged in a special material that blocks the harmful effects of light and air.

Scientifically-formulated. BioDiet's juice cocktails and dietary supplements are specially formulated to meet your total daily nutritional requirements. The lemon-flavored diet tea is a tasteful treat that helps curb appetite.

Special ingredients. Chromium is a trace mineral that your body needs to stay healthy, but rarely gets due to food processing. ChromeMate®, an ingredient in the dietary supplement, is a superior source of chromium.

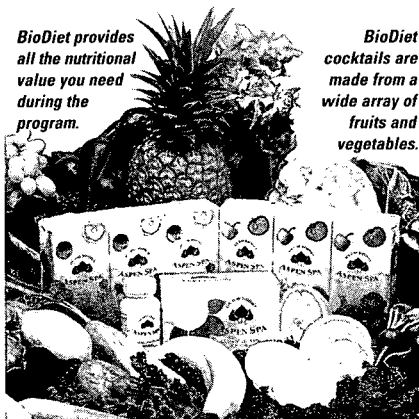
The supplement also contains CitriMax®, a safe and natural appetite suppressant. An all-natural plant extract rich in hydroxycitric acid, Citri-Max® reduces fatty acid synthesis, thereby reducing cravings for sweets.

Six days to a new you. Commit yourself to the program and you'll soon feel the effects of detoxification and weight loss! Get lots of rest, mild exercise and drink plenty of water in addition to the juice cocktails. By the third day you may already start to see results!

Extend the benefits. After completion of the

BioDiet provides all the nutritional value you need during the program.

BioDiet cocktails are made from a wide array of fruits and vegetables.



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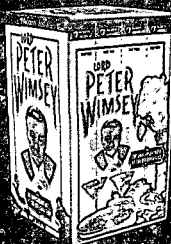
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